Whispering Isles

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The Radiophone Boys Stories

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By
ROY J. SNELL

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CHAPTER I

THE FIERY EYE

Cautiously Curlie Carson lifted a foot, then let it down with the slightest possible ripple on the surface of the lake. He paused to listen. To his sensitive ears there came a sound—a faint snap-snap. Was it a monkey or a jaguar shaking the dry branches of a dead mahogany tree, or was it a crocodile trying out his vise-like jaws in the dark?

He shuddered a little, yet he once more lifted a foot to bring it down without a sound. Night was all about him, the curiously mysterious, eerie night of a Central American jungle.

In one hand he carried a light rifle, in the

other a flashlight. Before him lay an egg-shaped patch of green water. All about him was the dark. Ten yards back of the spot where he stood was the jungle—palms, thorns, ferns, vines, mahogany trees, snakes, monkeys, jaguars—a truly tropical wilderness.

Before him was that stretch of green. Level as a floor, it spread away and away into the dark. A lake, they called it. A lake it was. But the stuff it was made of was not water. It was green ooze. Broad acres of green alga in a lake that was rapidly drying up—this was what lay away before him.

There were crocodiles in that ooze, thousands of them. Some were small, some large. Some a foot, some ten feet long. By day he had seen their ugly jaws. They slept with mouths wide open. Their rows of white ivory teeth were sharp as prison spikes. They were hiding now at the bottom of the ooze.

As he thought of this he stepped more cautiously. He wouldn't like one of those old boys chewing at his leg.

Suddenly he caught his breath. To the left of him, not ten yards away, in answer to the flash of his light there had come the red gleam of a large eye. The eye appeared to float like a drowning star upon the green ooze.

"S'queer," he mused. "You always read about the gleam of two eyes. Then you know where to shoot. That's only one. Can't tell where to aim. Might be headed up the lake, or down. Have to get closer."

Snapping off his light, he began again the slow business of silent progress through the ooze.

Curlie Carson had come to Central America for a lark. A little fishing, a lot of basking in the sun, some swimming, a little hunting—this was what he had looked forward to. Now here he was engrossed in a serious undertaking, the catching of a new type of crocodile for mounting in a French museum. Lucien Ducas, the son of the great French naturalist, Professor Pier Ducas, was his companion in this enterprise. Indeed it had been

the overpowering enthusiasm of Lucien that had drawn Curlie into it.

"Tiens!" the young French boy had exclaimed. "We shall capture *le plus grand* crocodile, the most wonderful, most terrible crocodile that ever has come from this wild land. Only come wiz me. You shall see."

Curlie had come. And had seen, seen plenty of big crocodiles and helped catch some small ones. Up to the present time their largest prize had been a mere baby eighteen inches in length. That was disgusting. Somehow they must do better. Curlie had decided upon hunting at night with a flashlight. So, while Lucien was off down the river for provisions, he was trying it out.

Slowly, cautiously, now lifting a foot that was heavy with green water growth, now bumping something in the water that might be a root or a rock or a sleeping crocodile, now dropping in a hole and narrowly avoiding a head on plunge into three feet of ooze, he moved forward until, with a sudden flash he

cast a circle of light before him. One could not have counted ten before his rifle cracked. The gleaming red eye was within three feet of him.

At once there came a mighty swirling and splashing of green ooze. Dazed by the bullet that had glanced off his hard skull, the crocodile circled the boy. Cutting tracks like a figure eight through the green ooze, he was now before and now behind Curlie.

Curlie watched in amazement. Something of a crocodile, this one; eight feet long, he thought, fourteen-inch jaws, sharp ivory teeth. The jaws were open, the white teeth gleaming.

Dropping the strap of his rifle over his shoulder, he awaited the end of this mad whirl. The end was sudden, startling. With mouth wide open, the crocodile came up with his ugly jaws close up against the boy's knee.

"Ugly chance," thought Curlie. "Don't want him to get me. Want to get him. He's the rare species, biggest we have seen.

Wouldn't Lucien be happy! Grand for his bloomin' old museum."

There was not a second to spare. The rifle in that position would not help. With inspiration born of sudden need, the boy thrust a thumb and finger into those gleaming red eyes. The jaws snapped shut. Clamping the jaws with both hands, the boy dashed madly for the shore.

There on the bank, in the dark, a mighty struggle followed. Coming out of his daze, the great reptile-like creature began twisting in the boy's grasp like a snake. He had not gone twice over before the boy's hands had been torn by the sharp protruding teeth.

"Won't do!" Curlie panted.

Loosing his grasp with one hand, he seized a scaly leg. To his great joy he found it possible to hold the jaws shut with one hand. With a grip on that leg he could keep the creature from twisting about.

"Get—get to camp," he puffed. "Be all right then."

He grinned grimly at thought of carrying a live crocodile into camp.

"Won't Lucien be paralyzed!"

The task, he found, was going to be hard enough. The "gator" swung his powerful tail with astonishing efficiency. A stroke across his leg made Curlie feel that his whole limb was frozen.

The next stroke passed his head with a wild swish.

"Here! None of that!" he exclaimed.

In the dark he barely missed stumbling over a boulder.

"The very thing!"

With a feeling of immense satisfaction, he brought the hard crocodile cranium down upon the boulder.

"There! Take that! And that! And that!"

The crocodile took the count. When he came to himself, Curlie had him trussed up with a pair of extra heavy leather high boot strings. His jaw was firmly fastened shut,

his legs were over his back, and Curlie was dragging him through the brush.

What Mr. Crocodile thought about the turn affairs had taken did not matter much. In due time he was dumped into a steel wire pen. After that Curlie hurried away to the tent. There Lucien found him a half hour later, munching casaba bread and drinking real Central American coffee.

The clothes he wore bore no sign of the conflict. He had changed to clean dry ones. His wounds were neatly dressed.

"Didn't go out?" enquired Lucien.

"Did. Have some coffee? Got a big one."

"Good luck. Oh great!" exclaimed the enthusiastic French boy. "Monsieur Curlie Carson, you are the fine shot."

"Rotten shot!" said Curlie, still munching dry bread. "Missed him—almost. Dazed him, that's all. Wanted to chaw my leg. Didn't let him. Brought him in alive."

"Alive!" The French boy's tone voiced his unbelief.

"Go see." Curlie wagged his head toward the pen.

Seizing a flashlight, the French boy dashed out into the dark.

A moment later Curlie head his exclamations of surprise.

"Wouldn't have done that," Curlie grinned. "He wouldn't. No Frenchman would have. It's the way we Americans do things. That's the way we put an end to the great war. Direct action, guess that's what you might call it."

A moment later Lucien returned.

"*Tres bien!* Very good!" beamed the French boy. "Father will be so very pleased. But you were in danger, my friend," he said gravely. "We must not hunt by night. In the day it is better."

"Yes? How you going to find them in broad daylight?"

"I have thought of a way," said Lucien. "In the morning I will show you."

"Not more than six feet, I am afraid,"

sighed Curlie, thinking again of his prize. "I thought he might be eight."

"Oh, but he is a beauty!" exclaimed Lucien. "It is quite wonderful to have him alive. My father will be so overjoyed. It is so great an advantage to study him before he is quite dead."

"Coffee?" asked Curlie suddenly. "Have some coffee. What do you say?"

Lucien smiled. Before he met Curlie he had not cared for coffee. Now he had grown quite fond of it. Curlie could make quite wonderful coffee—the American way, in a tiny percolator he carried with him wherever he went.

A half hour later found them still munching that crackly Carib bread and drinking coffee. It is astonishing how much a boy can eat in the jungle.

Their tent was of cotton, very thin. Inside it was lined with mosquito bar, for this was the land of many malaria mosquitoes. The light shining through the tent illuminated the

edge of the jungle. Of a sudden, in a dark corner beside a great black tamarind tree, there appeared a tawny yellow spot. It remained there a long time.

The two boys in the tent formed a strong contrast. Curlie was a slim, light-haired American boy. About the corners of his eyes, even in moments of greatest repose, there was a faint suggestion of a smile. The face of Lucien, the dark-haired French boy, constantly wore a sober mien. The studious French boy takes life very seriously indeed. Lucien was of the studious type.

"Monsieur Curlie Carson," Lucien said after a long period of silence, "to-night you placed yourself in grave danger. Why?"

Too much surprised by this sudden question to reply, Curlie sat and stared.

"I," said the French boy, not waiting for an answer, "I hunt crocodiles. I suffer this." He held out his hands covered by red blotches from the poisonous bites of little sand flies. "And this." He touched the mosquito bar

tent. "I am in danger from him." He pointed to a drying snake skin. "I do all this for my country, for the people of our beloved France." He paused to look his companion in the eye.

"You do not understand, perhaps," he went on. "It is service I think of, service for my people. My father has taught me so.

"And it *is* service. In my country are thousands, in Paris alone hundreds of thousands who toil. They spin in the mills. They grind in the factory. They sell in the shops, that France and the most beautiful Paris may live. Will they ever see the beauty and the wildness that lives in the jungle? No, my friend, they never will. But my father and I, with those taxidermists who work always with us, we will bring the jungle to them. Some day, not such a long way off either, there will be a great glass case, oh very great," he spread wide his arms, "ten times as big as this tent, twenty. In that case will be water, imitation water, and back of

that the river bank and the jungle. In the water and on the bank will be the monstrous, the most terrible crocodile, caught by you, Monsieur Curlie Carson, and by me. Then a thousand, ten thousand, children in Paris, yes and the old ones too, those who toil in the mills, the factories, the shops, will pass by and they will say: 'How beautiful! How wonderful! How terrible! It is the jungle brought from afar to us!'

"Then, Monsieur Curlie Carson, I shall be very glad for I shall have served my country and most beautiful Paris. But you, Monsieur Curlie Carson?"

He paused to stare at Curlie.

"We Americans are not unfriendly to France," Curlie smiled back. "Indeed we should be your comrades. We have fought side by side in a great war."

"True! True! But——"

"I know," laughed Curlie. "You won't understand when I tell you. Life is too serious for you. But we Americans, many of us love

danger and adventure for danger and adventure's sake alone.

"To-night," he mused, "that was grand! I took a chance. I won. I conquered the crocodile. What does it matter after that?"

"No," said the French boy, wrinkling his brow, "that I cannot understand.

"But we shall know more, better adventure!" he exclaimed. "We shall excel. We have a six foot crocodle. It is well. *Tres bien!* But it is said there are very great crocodiles in this land, very great and very ancient. Twenty-five feet long, a thousand years old. So say the natives. My father, he does not believe. He says twenty feet, one hundred years. But twenty feet! Twenty feet, Monsieur Curlie! Think! We shall find one, *le plus grand.* We shall excel. None shall surpass us."

In his excitement the boy sprang to his feet. His shadow wavering across the walls of the tent appeared to hop out into the night. The tawny creature that had lingered long in the

shadow by the black tamarind tree vanished into the fastnesses of the jungle.

"You don't expect me to catch one like that with my two hands, do you?" drawled Curlie.

"*Non! Mais non!* We shall shoot him. Put a bullet in the back of his neck. Skin him. His skin is enough. He shall be studied carefully by the taxidermists. He shall be mounted, grand and fierce as life. He shall haunt *le grand* museum and *le petit garcon* shall exclaim:

"'How grand! How terrible!'"

"In that case," said Curlie, "I think we better turn in."

A half hour later, in hammocks swung from the tent poles, the two boys slept in peace, while in the dark corner beside the black tamarind tree a tawny yellow coat gleamed again.

CHAPTER II

THE GOLDEN PHANTOM

The sun was not yet up when Curlie, dropping silently upon the matted floor of the tent, slipped on a pair of soft low shoes and crept out for a breath of the tropical morning.

It was glorious. The deep dull green of the palms, the faint gleam of distant mist that hung over the lake, the still cool air, the first twitter of small birds, the distant shrill scream of wild parrots—all these went far toward stirring up in his soul the realization that all about him was the unusual, that for once in his life he had utterly escaped from those things that were familiar and tiring to the senses. Throwing back his shoulders, he tossed his arms high to murmur in the exclamation of ecstasy:

"It's great! Great!"

But what was this? Had he caught the sound of a movement over there to the left? As he looked a flash of black and old gold appeared beside the big tamarind tree at the edge of the clearing. The next instant it had vanished.

"A tiger!" he breathed.

With three long, silent strides he reached the tent. Gripping a short rifle that carried a heavy charge, he cut squarely across the clearing and, without a second's hesitation, entered the jungle at the point where the strange creature had left it.

A "tiger" as the natives call him, in reality a jaguar, is the prize prey of Central American forests. A great tawny cat measuring sometimes seven feet in length, he prowls the jungles, climbs the mountains and descends into the valleys; kills a deer, a sheep or a bullock, and escapes with his prize into the jungle again. His spotted skin is the most prized trophy of any to be taken from that strange land. Many are the hunters who

have followed jungle trails for days, enduring many hardships, facing multitudinous dangers in the quest of his trail or his lair, only to return without so much as bringing back an account of encountering the beast.

"I'm a lucky boy," thought Curlie to himself. "My first week in the jungle, and I have sighted a tiger."

He was sure it must be a tiger. The thing had moved. It had passed out of his sight. What other creature of this wild land wears a tawny coat?

So, with finger on the trigger, with breath coming short and sharp, his heart pounding against his ribs, he bent low to creep along the low trail.

Moving stealthily, parting each cluster of leaves with care, avoiding dead branches, expecting every moment to catch again that gleam of old gold, he penetrated farther and farther into the jungle.

Now the trail led down a dry ravine carpeted with moss and dead ferns; now passed

up a rocky ridge; and now descended into a valley on the other side.

It was as he prepared to descend this slope that he once more caught a glimpse of the wary creature he followed. It was lying, half concealed by the leaves of a low palm, upon the fallen trunk of a great tree.

"Oh! Ah!" the boy breathed.

Dropping flat behind a rock, he leveled his rifle to sight down the barrel. It was a perfect mark. His heart beat fast but his head was cool. He calculated his aim well. The bullet should strike just back of the shoulder, piercing the heart.

"That's the plague of it!" he murmured. "The shoulder. Can't see it. Head's hidden by that palm leaf. Have to risk it. Shoot at the edge of the leaf. Have——"

With a low exclamation of disappointment, he sprang to his feet. The creature had rolled lightly off the log and had vanished.

For more than an hour after that Curlie followed a winding trail. When signs failed,

fate seemed to guide him, for twice he sighted the grand prey. If fate guided him, she too must be tricking him, for twice as he stole forward for a better shot he tripped and fell. Once a tie-tie vine caught the toe of his shoe; again, with a little cry of alarm he sprang away from a creature that moved under his feet. Was it snake or armadillo? He did not pause to see.

But in good time fate at least seemed to play the game. On the broad overhanging limb of a breadnut tree he caught again that yellow gleam. This time the golden prey, who was ten feet in the air, seemed fast asleep.

With elaborate caution Curlie stalked in. Now behind a palm, now in the rear of a giant mahogany, now creeping on all fours through a dense growth of ferns, he came at last to a position where he could not fail. Dropping on one knee, with fingers that trembled slightly, he brought his rifle to position.

Had he caught a sudden gleam of light brown that flashed along the other side of the breadnut branch, he would have dropped his rifle in horror at thought of the thing he was about to do.

He did not see, so with deadly precision he took his aim.

But again he was puzzled. The head was hidden. A clump of foliage concealed it.

"Darn!" he whispered. "Position not so good, after all."

For a matter of seconds, in search of a better position, his eyes roved the jungle. When they returned to the breadnut tree, to his vast astonishment he saw that his prey had vanished.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Disappeared without a sound."

Then of a sudden an alarming thought struck him. He was in a tropical jungle alone. He had come far; had taken no notice of directions. Which way led to camp? This he could not so much as guess.

"Lost!" he muttered. "Could I be lost?" A feeling of wild consternation sweeping over him left him cold.

"And yet," he thought more soberly, "I may be able to remember. I must try."

Drawing a bit of paper and the stub of a pencil from his pocket, he began to trace a rude outline. Marking the ups and downs by criss-cross lines, he indicated the way he believed he had come. Having done this, he felt immensely relieved. In time of stress or danger it is well to do something, even though the thing you do is dead wrong. It helps to steady the nerves.

* * * * *

Charmed, fascinated, his bosom heaving with joy and hope, Lucien, the French boy, clung to a branch of a sapodillo tree and watched with gleaming eyes the surface of that green lake in which Curlie had caught their first fair sized crocodile.

As he watched he saw bubbles rise. They came from the green alga at the bottom of the

shallow lake. At no point was the water more than five feet deep. These bubbles did not rise from undisturbed alga. They rose in clusters. The fascinating part of it was, they formed designs upon the surface. Now a circle; now a long tapering wedge; and now a form that suggested a claw.

And now, as the boy watched, one of the figures began moving across the water. He could have shouted for joy. Like a pattern on cloth, or an etching on glass, the bubbles formed a figure on the surface of the water, a figure in outline of an eight-foot crocodile.

Having discovered that Curlie and the heavy rifle were gone, without much thought of fear for his companion's safety, Lucien had eaten a light breakfast, then had gone out to study the broad green surface of the crocodile lake. He had discovered that when molested the green scum at the bottom gave off bubbles, and that these bubbles formed on the surface of the water a pattern of the creature causing the disturbance.

The surface image of the crocodile did not vanish as he moved slowly along on the bottom. It formed and re-formed. Now a foot pattern vanished; now it reappeared eight inches further on. Now a tail disappeared, only to reappear. And all this in bubbles on the surface of the water. The crocodile was all this time on the bottom. Lucien had seen not so much as a tip of a tail.

"He's a fair sized one," he said to himself. "How simple! How very, very simple it is going to be! We have only to follow the bubbles, here and there until Monsieur Crocodile tires. Then he comes to the surface. Then bing! We harpoon him.

"I only wish Curlie were here," he mused as he climbed down from his perch and made his way toward the small dugout that lay upon the bank a hundred yards away.

"Try it anyway. See how it works. Trail a small one first," he murmured.

He did trail a small one first, and with the most astonishing results.

CHAPTER III

THE SPIRIT OF THE JUNGLE

After platting his way back through the jungle as best he could, Curlie found that he was sure of but two facts. He had turned to the right more often than to the left. He had gone up hill far more often than down. With these two facts in mind, he began the task of retracing his steps.

He had gone scarcely a hundred yards when he discovered a fork in the trail. He had expected this.

"Down rather than up," he told himself, then took the down trail. This plan gave him a feeling of security, an assurance of ultimate success. But, after two hours of slow travel, he came up against a rugged wall of rocks. Sitting down to think he realized that the surface of the land and the very

vegetation of this spot was different from the territory that surrounded their camp. He knew that he must be far off the trail. The fact that his hands were torn and bleeding, that his knees were bruised, that a swarm of savage flies were continually after him, that he had eaten no breakfast, and that it was now nearing the noonday hour, did not add to his comfort.

In the midst of all this, down the narrow trail he again caught sight of that golden gleam.

"Following, haunting me!" he shuddered. What was that wild story he heard from the lips of some Indian? These forests were haunted by evil spirits, so the legend ran. Taking on the form of a beautiful woman, the evil spirits lured men to their death.

"This time," he told himself, "it's taken on the form of a tiger." Did not the Indians of these mountains often dress in tiger skins? Had he seen the creature's head. He had not.

For a moment, so complete was the illusion

that he sat there cold and still, petrified by fear. The next, with a laugh and a wild fling of his arms, he cast off the spell.

Even as he did this, the golden shadow whose path he had haunted, and who now seemed to haunt his, moved closer, to retrace its steps, then come nearer again. It appeared to invite him to follow.

Should he follow? A cold chill ran up his spine. He rose to stand there irresolute. Then, once more he shook himself free from the mad dream.

He lifted his rifle as if for a shot. Instantly the thing of black and gold vanished.

With his mind cleared of all fantasy, he now stood trying to plan a way to get back to camp.

"Lost men climb trees," he told himself.

"Might not be so bad," he thought again. "Sloping here. Should be able to see down into the valley. Big breadnut tree over there. Try that."

Some twenty minutes later, after a hard

struggle, he found himself comfortably seated on a great mass of grass-like foliage at the top of the world.

A wonderful sight met his gaze. Stretching far as eye could see was a virgin forest of palms, mahogany, Santa Maria, black tamarind, and many other tropical trees. At its very center lay a beautiful green lake.

At first this lake meant little to him, but when at last his attention was caught by a black speck on its surface he was all eyes.

"Could it be our lake?" he asked himself in greatest excitement. "And is that Lucien in his dugout? If so, what is he doing?"

Truly the black speck was behaving queerly. For a time it stood still. Then with a sudden start it went racing like a water bug across the surface. It slowed down to a steady pace, came to a standstill, rested there for a moment, then shot away again.

"If it's Lucien, he must have lost his mind!" he grumbled.

The longer he watched the more certain he

became that this was their lake and that the black spot was Lucien and his boat.

"For," he reasoned, "where else is there a lake of this size with a boat on its surface?"

He was still undecided on what course he should follow, when nature took a hand. Came a loud rumbling roll from the mountains above him.

"Thunder storm," he mumbled. "Tallest tree is no place for a fellow in such a storm."

Hastily taking his bearings by his small wrist compass, he climbed down from the tree, then struck straight toward the lake.

"Pretty tough!" he told himself as thorns and brambles tore at him from every side. "But it's the only way."

Even as he said this, off to the right, not twenty paces away, through a clearing made by a great fallen tree he again caught that gleam of old gold.

He did not look at it twice. He was through hunting tigers for that day; but not forever. Oh no, not quite forever.

CHAPTER IV

THE CANNIBAL

The black spot Curlie had seen was Lucien and his dugout. But Lucien was not out of his head. Indeed, as he paddled about in his small dugout on the surface of that broad green lake, his keen mind was very much on the alert. He was following the phantom of a young crocodile, a phantom made of bubbles on the surface of the water. Now the phantom moved slowly and was clear and distinct, even to the toes. Now it shot forward rapidly and was a blur, a mere streak that indicated swift motion. That explained Lucien's strange and erratic motions. He moved as the crocodile beneath the water moved, now slow, now fast, now slow again, and now not at all.

"He'll tire of this after a while, then I'll get

him," he told himself. "Wonder where Curlie is keeping himself."

He had wondered that several times during the course of the morning.

Almost at once, after he had launched his dugout, a line of swift forming bubbles had shot out before him.

"A small one," he had murmured. "He'll do for a trial. Besides, father requests a small one, three or four feet long. He is to be mounted in the set, standing on his four feet clear of the ground. Crocodiles stand like that, alligators seldom. Ah yes, my little friend, you shall show that to the boys and girls of the most beautiful Paris."

He had followed the young crocodile for two hours. More than once the torpid creature, overcome by the increasing warmth of the water, paused in his flight to close his eyes in sleep at the bottom.

Patient prodding brought him to life again.

"He will come to the top soon," the boy told himself. "Very soon he—"

But what was this? At the spot where his young crocodile, traveling slowly over the green alga at the bottom, was leaving a perfect image of himself on the surface, there had come a sudden mad swirl of bubbles.

"Why! What? He can't make all that muss." The boy stood up in his dugout to stare.

Bubbles by the million were rising. In a wild eddy they swirled about his boat. The very surface of the water was broken into rippling wavelets that went racing away toward shore.

It was as if a hot spring had suddenly broken through the mud at the bottom.

Lucien was of two minds. The turmoil was so terrifying that he was tempted to run away. Yet so great was his curiosity that he continued to stand in his insecure position, staring with wide eyes.

"I've seen a hippopotamus behave like that, when he comes out of the mud," he told himself, "but here there are no hippopotamuses.

No, it is some other thing. I wonder what?"

He was soon enough to know. The bubbles were beginning to assume a definite form, the swirling to subside.

What he saw next he could not believe. He closed his eyes, opened them, closed them, then opened again, to murmur:

"No, it is not. It cannot be. Yet it is."

Before him on the surface of the water was the phantom bubble image of a crocodile. As always before, when the creature settled silently down upon the alga, it had given off bubbles that etched the outline of his form on the surface.

And such a form as it was! Great massive paws, thick legs, a body broad as a tree trunk, and twenty feet long.

"Twenty feet!" he murmured. "And such a head!"

Of a sudden the full realization of the tragedy enacted down there beneath the surface came to him. His young crocodile, the one he had followed for two hours, would not

be mounted in the Paris museum. He had been eaten by the monster crocodile whose image was at this moment etched upon the surface.

"A cannibal!" Lucien murmured beneath his breath. "That great beast is a cannibal!" The thought made him sick.

But at that moment a wonderful realization came to him. Here, just before him, was his objective, the giant crocodile. He had been told of some such creatures, had dreamed of capturing one, but up to this moment had scarcely believed in their existence. Here was indisputable proof.

"The prize! The great prize!" he whispered. "If only we can get him!"

At once his mind was in a turmoil. What was to be done? Curlie was away. With him was the heavy rifle. At the present moment the great beast lay quiet beneath the surface. He had eaten. Would he, like many of his torpid kind, lie dormant there for hours?

"If he does," the boy told himself, "all that is necessary is that I mark the spot with the shaft of my harpoon. Then when Monsieur Curlie Carson comes we shall stir him up and follow him to his death. The—the old cannibal!" he said fiercely.

At that moment there came the sudden roll of thunder. As if awakened by this, the great crocodile began moving toward the shore.

Slowly Lucien followed him. Eerie business, this, following a creature weighing tons, with jaws so massive that, should he choose, he might crush the narrow dugout as a child crushes a straw. Still, Lucien followed on.

He did not follow long. With all the suddenness of a tropical storm, rain came pelting down. Beating the surface of the lake into a million little rivet-like protrusions, it destroyed in an instant every trace of the monster's bubble image which but the moment before had been so nicely etched there.

"Lost! Now I have lost him," the boy groaned.

Rain fell for only twenty minutes. Yet in that time the monster had crawled away and had fallen asleep, and on the once more placid surface of the lake there remained not one trace of him.

After three hours of vain searching, the boy returned sadly to camp. Opportunity had knocked loudly at his door, but nature had intervened.

"I will get you yet!" he exclaimed fiercely. "You shall see!"

CHAPTER V

PLANNING NEW ADVENTURES

Curlie trusted himself no longer to the low canopied deer trails; but, setting himself a direct course by the compass, unsheathed his machete and with its two foot blade hacked his way through the jungle.

It was a hard and bitter struggle. Soaked to the skin by the rain that had overtaken him, torn at by brambles, half blinded by little flies, he battled on. Now he clambered down a ledge where a misstep meant death; now bent low beneath broad spreading palms; and now came up short as the head of a poisonous snake reared in air before him.

The snake lost his head; the flies were crushed by the hundreds; cliffs were passed in safety; and just as the night shadows began to gather, tired, hungry, in a sorry state, but still game, he burst into the tent.

So enthused was Lucien over his latest discovery that despite his companion's disheveled state, his story must be told at once.

Nor was Curlie opposed to listening. "We'll camp right here!" he exclaimed as Lucien finished. "We'll haunt that lake until the old dragon shows his image on the water. Then we'll get him. *We'll get him!*"

"Brava! Vive le Monsieur Curlie Carson! Death to the dragon!" Lucien did a wild dance about the narrow enclosure.

"And now," said Curlie, "how about a little hot chocolate with malted milk, some fresh fried fish, a loaf of bread, six pilot biscuits and one of those little barrels of ginger snaps? I'm starved."

"At once, Monsieur. At once!" exclaimed Lucien.

Two hours later the boys lay on fresh beds of palm leaves. With the faint fragrance of palm leaves and the deep jungle drugging their senses, with the mosquito bar canopy moving above them like a pale ghost in the

moonlight, they found this the hour for dreaming.

"Lucien," said Curlie after a long silence, "were you ever in an abandoned city?"

"Abandoned?" The French boy sat up in astonishment. "No person living there?"

"Yes."

"We have no such cities in our most beautiful France. But such a city—it must be quite full of ghosts."

"So it is," laughed Curlie. "The ghosts of dead men's dreams."

"I was once in such a city," he went on after a time, "an abandoned mining city in our own land. Time had been when the streets, all grown with grass now, were thronged by thousands, when the amusement halls, whose roofs are now falling in, were gay with light, laughter and song. It's all gone. Sort of sad place to be. But in a way you like it. It's fun to rummage around in those abandoned stores and shanties. It was a gold mining town. One always hopes he

may come upon a sack of gold hidden away somewhere."

"You would hope that," said Lucien. "One must dream, or what is life worth?"

His eyes grew hazy. But the moment before he had been dreaming, dreaming of his father and his beautiful flaxen haired sister Jeanne, and of the good times they had had about a certain old chateau in France. The chateau had belonged to the Ducas family for generations. It belonged to them no longer. The cruel war had taken it from them. Lucien remembered it only as he had romped upon its green lawn as a small boy. Yet he would never cease to dream of finding a treasure great enough to provide ransom for the lost Ducas estate.

He wanted to do this for his father and for his beautiful sixteen year old sister. While he wandered in the jungle, Jeanne remained upon St. Christopher's Cay, and cared for her father, the very great naturalist.

"And yet," Lucien said, talking more to

himself than to Curlie, "she, too, finds time to dream. When the work about the cabin is done, she sails a little dugout among the cays. And she tells me that the palms on the cays and the surf on the beaches of the little islands keep whispering to her of Spanish galleons wrecked on the coral reef, and of gold, gold, gold, great quantities of Spanish gold."

"She might find gold at that," said Curlie.

"She find gold? A girl? Sailing where a thousand have sailed before? What chance?"

"Lucien," said Curlie eagerly, "you are always dreaming of gold. How would you like to go search an abandoned city?"

"Where? In America? How can I?"

"Here in the jungle; perhaps not a hundred miles from this spot."

"You talk in riddles."

"I will tell you." Curlie's eyes shone. "On the peninsula of Yucatan, some distance inland, stands a City of Santa Cruz de Brava.

In this city a massive church erected four centuries ago rears its massive walls to the sky. The walls and floor of the Plaza are hewn stone. Hundreds of homes, scores of magnificent shops, but not one single human inhabitant. Santa Cruz de Brava, only a few years ago a city of 5,000, is now completely abandoned."

"Why?" Lucien's voice was filled with astonishment.

"Indians. Little Maya Indians. Those miniature people, who have through all the centuries been robbed and frightfully abused by Spaniards and Mexicans alike, took to the bush and from their hiding place kept up such a gorilla warfare as made life impossible in Santa Cruz de Brava.

"But listen!" His tone was deep and low. "Santa Cruz de Brava has been inhabited for four centuries, now by Spaniards, now by Indians, and now by Mexicans. But all of these had gold. Each in turn was obliged to flee for his life. Who knows what treasure

lies hidden, perhaps half revealed by decaying walls or falling masonry in that abandoned city?"

"Ah yes, Monsieur Curlie Carson. Who knows? We will go there, Monsieur Curlie Carson. We will go." The boy's tones were low and tense. He was dreaming again of that chateau in France.

"But first," he added a moment later, "we must capture *le plus grand* monster, that most terrible cannibal crocodile. This we must do for science."

"Yes," agreed Curlie, "we will do this first. If possible, tomorrow."

At that the two boys turned over upon their mats and fell asleep.

As the moon rose higher its light fell upon a spot of old gold that stood half concealed beneath the great tamarind tree. It was the Golden Phantom.

For three days the boys carried out their program as planned. Morning, noon and evening, and by night with torches, they haunted

the surface of that lake. The water was full of crocodiles. Every day they sent scores of them bubbling away through the green scum at the bottom, but not once did they raise the "Old Dragon," as they had come to call Lucien's king of the crocodiles.

"Something's wrong," said Curlie on the morning of the fourth day. "Either you did not see that monster, or——"

"I did see him; no, not him, but I saw his bubbles, which is quite as well. I did. I *did,* Monsieur Carson." Lucien grew vehement in his self defense.

"Then," said Curlie, "either he is dead, or he has left the lake."

"Left the lake, Monsieur! Left the lake! That would be tragic!"

"Not so tragic as you think. So large a reptile could not drag himself through the jungle without leaving a track."

"True, true! We shall see. To-day we shall see."

That day they followed the shore by land.

They had not gone half way around when Curlie let out a low exclamation. He pointed at a track that could have been made by none other than Old Dragon.

There were other tracks. Further up among the dead leaves there was such a trail as might be made by a sawlog dragged over the ground.

In silence, cutting through vines here, creeping under there, climbing down, then climbing higher and higher, the boys followed the trail.

Now they came upon a spot wallowed bare by the monster while he slept. Now they marvelled at the creature's strength as they attempted to lift a boulder torn from its age long resting place by the monster trail blazer. And now they smiled at the scattered feathers of a great bronze turkey whose curiosity had led him too close to those massive jaws.

"Where can he be going?" Curlie asked. "There can't be water on this rocky mountain side."

There was water, all the same. Plenty of it. The sun was high. It was shining almost straight down when, on passing beneath a clump of ferns, they came of a sudden upon a sort of narrow plateau. At the edge of this plateau was a pool, a wide deep pool of crystal water. And in the pool, at the bottom, twenty feet below, was Old Dragon himself.

In his eagerness to get a better look Lucien dislodged a small rock. It sank to the bottom close to the monster's head. At that he opened one huge eye to stare up at the intruders. Then, slowly, with a suggestion of a wink, he closed that eye again.

"The old demon!" exclaimed Curlie. "How are we to get him now?"

"Monsieur Curlie Carson, we will camp here beside this pool. Monsieur Dragon must come up for food. We will watch the pool. We will get him then," said Lucien.

"So we will," said Curlie as he stared down into the depths of the pool.

"Look!" he exclaimed suddenly. "See that

yellow gleam close by his right front claw?"

"*Oui*" (yes), said the French boy.

"What is it?"

"Gold, perhaps."

"Gold? How would it come there?"

"Many years ago there was a great people here, a very great civilization," said Lucien. "I have read it all in books. Temples, palaces and all that. These pools, fed by underground streams, were their water supply. They worshipped the pools. Many times as offerings they cast into the pools gold and jade ornaments; yes, and the hearts of fair maidens as well.

"But come, I will tell you more another time!" he exclaimed. "We must go down now. It will be dark before we can return with things necessary for a night beside this pool."

CHAPTER VI

AN ASTONISHING TRAGEDY

It was night. The moon, a great golden ball, floated serenely upon the surface of the dark pool. Shadows of palms seemed to stretch out eager hands to grasp it.

Curlie, half asleep, watched the surface and the floating moon. Huddling in a heap beneath the sheltering shadows of a palm that overhung the water, he was completely hidden from view.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, wide awake. Had he heard a sound? Yes, off to the left, a rustle. Was it breaking water, or parting bush? Nerves all a-tingle, gripping his rifle, he leaned forward to scan the surface of the pool.

"Not a ripple," he whispered.

For a moment his eyes roved the narrow

circle of foliage that framed the pool. Then, with a suddenness that came near to bringing an exclamation from his lips, he discovered the cause of the sound. One of those small brown deer that inhabit these hills had come down to the pool for a drink.

As the deer stood there, ears alert, eyes shining, graceful neck arched, slender limbs set for a sudden spring, he made a picture that the boy would not soon forget.

"How—how perfect!" he thought. "What —what an opportunity!"

His rifle was aimed that way. A mere lifting of the barrel, the pulling of a trigger, and rich venison broiled over the coals would be his breakfast.

He did not lift the barrel.

"Time enough," he thought. "The picture is too perfect to be destroyed."

This decision was soon enough regretted.

Slowly, the muscles of the deer relaxed into trustful repose. Then, with a graceful curve, his neck bent. A ripple spread over the sur-

face of the water. He drank, drank deep and long.

But what was this? Of a sudden repose was shattered. Came a mad swirl of water, a gurgling cry from the deer, a splash, a sudden rush of water closing in, then again a calm surface and the deep silence of jungle at night.

With cold drops of perspiration standing out on the tip of his nose, the boy slid back deeper into the shadows. He had witnessed a sudden demonstration of the speed and power of the Old Dragon.

"What if it had been I?" he thought as a tremor ran over his body. "What if I had been too close to the rim? What if I had moved too slowly, or been asleep? Man! Oh man!"

He moved back three paces farther into the brush.

"Might as well make it a mile!" he grumbled a moment later as he stood up to stretch his stiffened muscles. "His nibs, the old giant of the pool, has caught himself a dinner, a

very large dinner indeed. He will sleep for three days."

Hastening down to camp, he told Lucien of the unfortunate occurrence.

"Tell you what," said Curlie. "Your father will begin to worry about you if we remain away much longer. Besides, we are short of food. How would it be if we should load the crocodiles we have caught into the dugout and paddle them down to the yacht? If our giant friend decides to move again, it won't be difficult to follow him. But he's not likely to move. He's fed up for three days."

Lucien was glad enough of an opportunity to visit his father, so next morning just after daybreak their dugout rounded a bend of the river. Leaving their camp, and the Old Dragon and the Golden Phantom to look out for themselves, the two boys headed straight for the Whispering Isles.

CHAPTER VII

LISTENING TO THE WHISPERS

The two days that followed were full of long, dreamy hours for Curlie. Pier Ducas and his son were busy working over the crocodiles that had been brought. Since Curlie knew nothing of this part of a naturalist's work, and Jeanne's father preferred to have her away from it all, there was time enough for skimming in and out among the whispering isles, those fascinating little palm grown islands of the tropics.

For a change nothing could have been more delightful. Waving palms, rippling waters, a perfect sky, a sail that responded to the lightest touch. Who could ask for more?

As for Jeanne, whose blowing hair and bright golden gown made her seem more a nymph of the sea than a real person, she

would lie for hours against the cushions in the prow and listen to Curlie's tales of adventure on the seven seas and in many climes.

Jeanne was not all nymph. Once they visited the turtle nets of a native fisherman who lay at home, sick with a fever. In one net they found a hawk's bill turtle.

"See!" exclaimed the girl in great joy. "We have a prize! His shell is worth nine dollars a pound. His flesh is very good. Our old friend the fisherman has been kind. He has taught me to troll for barracuda and tarpon. He has told me many wonderful stories of times long ago, of ships and buccaneers, of Spanish galleons loaded with gold, and of battles on the sea. Oh! I should tell you them. But first we must get the turtle for him."

She spoke lightly of this task. It was not a light task. Indeed they struggled for two hours. They lifted him close to the surface a dozen times, only to lose footing and see him sink again to the bottom.

"Now! Now we have him!" panted the

plucky girl as with a final exertion of her splendid young shoulders she helped roll the turtle into the boat.

As Curlie sat there panting, looking first at the turtle and then at the girl, he found a new admiration for the golden girl of the sea.

"Why don't you go with your brother into the jungle?" he asked as he studied the girl whose face glowed with the joy of struggle and final triumph.

"I?" The girl laughed a low musical laugh. "Why, in France we do not do it. I am a girl. Frail like a flower, you know."

"Yes, frail as a sunflower," laughed Curlie.

"No—no I cannot go," said the girl after a moment of dreaming. "Dearly as I would love to, it would not be right, not right to my father. He is mature. He has fixed ideas. Those ideas do not change. No, I cannot go. My first duty is to be with my father. But for all that, I may dream. You have perhaps read your English author, Tennyson, his Idyls of the King?"

"Yes."

"Ah, you will remember then how all the brave knights went in search of the Holy Grail, and how the King stayed at home because he had work to do. You will remember too that he said, 'When the work is done, then let the dreams come.' And they do come.

"So I too sometimes dream, dream of wrecks and of Spanish treasure that would bring us back our ancestral castle in our most beautiful France.

"Monsieur Carson," she suddenly pointed away to the north, "do you see that little cay and the low reef at the end of it?"

Curlie nodded.

"It was there, they say, that a Spanish treasure ship was sunk many years ago. Spanish seamen were fighting British buccaneers. They lost, and their treasure ship went on the reefs over there and was buried beneath the coral sands.

"And, Monsieur Carson," she touched his arm ever so lightly, "there are times when

these sighing palms, these whispering isles, speak to me of vast treasure hidden out here beneath the sand."

"But how are you to find it?" asked Curlie.

"Oh, somehow, somewhere." The girl's words were light.

Their sail went up. They skimmed across the sea.

"I would feel surer of finding treasure in Santa Cruz de Brava," said Curlie.

"Santa Cruz de Brava?" said the girl. "What is that?"

"An abandoned city."

"Ah! An abandoned city. How entrancing!"

"Lucien and I are going there some time. Will you go with us?"

"That, as you know, I cannot do. You are always forgetting that my father is French, very much so. But please tell me about it."

Curlie told her the story of the abandoned city. Many were her cries of surprise and delight as the tale unfolded.

"Why do you not go at once?" she cried.

"But there is Lucien and the Old Dragon."

"Oh! The dragon. Only a crocodile! He can wait. How much more exciting is a treasure hunt! Do you really wish to go?"

"Very much."

"Very well. I will plead your cause."

She must have pleaded well, for late that night Curlie and Lucien sat on the beach beneath the moon and the sighing palms, whispering of a long journey and much treasure. The next day their dugout, laden with a ten days supply of food, headed toward the broken shore of Yucatan and the one time port where would-be voyagers to the now abandoned city were wont in other days to land.

"I am a little worried about that Old Dragon," said Lucien.

"We can't lose him," said Curlie, eager for fresh adventure. "If he leaves the pool, though the trail be six months old, we can trace him."

"But these Indians, these Mayas? Are they not dangerous?"

" Only to Mexicans and Spanish. Americans have more than once landed on their shore to search among ruins of ancient Indian cities, and have never been molested."

Despite his confident assurance, Curlie's brow wrinkled with anxiety as they neared the shores of this little known land of mystery, of abandoned cities and strange little savages.

Jeanne remained on the palm covered island with her father. She stood on the beach to watch the white sail of her brother's boat until it vanished from sight, then with a sigh turned toward her father's bamboo cabin.

Her heart was heavy. She loved her father, and was glad to be with him. But she loved mystery and adventure too. She longed for the thrills. She, too, felt the drawing charm of search for buccaneers' treasure.

" Treasure! " she whispered as she rounded a bend on the beach.

" Treasure," the sea murmured back to her.

Three black buzzards sat upon the frond of

a palm and solemnly nodded their heads as much as to say:

"Yes. Yes. Treasure. We know all about it. We have been here long. Out there on the reefs you will find it."

They nodded their heads again and again, then gathered in a solemn group apparently to talk it over.

That afternoon the girl sailed with her father to Belize. There she purchased a khaki knicker suit, and the sea knew her gorgeous gowns from Paris no longer.

That night she entered into solemn compact with Camene, a Spanish half-caste girl with eyes black as coal. By the terms of the compact they were to search the sea together for hidden treasure.

Meanwhile the two boys sailed steadily on toward the abandoned city and high adventure.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DUNGEON'S SECRET

"Wooo! Dark down here. Bats. Hear 'em snap? Something on the floor. I struck it with my foot. Sounded hollow like a skull. Can't get the flashlight to work, the catch sticks.

"There!" Lucien's voice came up hollow and spooky. "There she is," as a circle of yellow light spread about him. "Got her working."

"Oh! Ah!" he drew in his breath sharply. "It is a skull. Three of them. Bones too, the bones of men. Died down here. Something over in that corner too." The light flashing from corner to corner, at last sent a steady gleam upon a pile of small cylinders. Curious looking cylinders they were, and covered deep with dust.

"Might be gold. Coins rolled up as the bankers do it," he thought. "Doubloons, guineas, pieces of eight."

Curlie's face showed plainly in the small square of light which was the entrance to the cistern-like dungeon. He sat looking thoughtfully downward.

The two boys were at this moment on the mainland of the peninsula of Yucatan, in the abandoned city of Santa Cruz de Brava. Thirty miles inland, over a railroad so long abandoned that it was with great difficulty that a mule drew a small flat car over it, they had come to visit the abandoned city of many mysteries and, perchance, much treasure.

From this city the daring, murderous, unforgiving, unrelenting Santa Cruz Indians had driven the four thousand inhabitants. They had deserted it in a body. And here it stood, a haunting spectacle—humble homes, palaces of stone, stores, a splendid plaza, all overgrown with brush and dropping into decay. And at its very center stood a towering mass

of masonry with walls eight feet thick, the ancient Spanish church built in the sixteenth century.

It was in the center of the floor of this church that Curlie and Lucien had, while searching the debris for small curios, come upon the stone trap door which led to the dungeon.

So here they were, two boys alone in an abandoned city at the heart of a tropical wilderness, one in a dungeon, the other on the floor above. Indians were all about them; might, for all they knew, at that moment be creeping up the silent streets that led to the high vaulted church. Yet here they were, ransacking a dungeon which, from the smell of it and the look of it, had not been entered by mortal man in many a decade.

Dreaming of gold, a rich reward of doubloons, ducats, castellanos and pieces of eight, the French boy, stepping carefully that he might not tread upon the least finger bone of the unknown dead who rested there in peace,

made his way across the dungeon floor, to at last brush away the dust and lift one of the cylinders from its place.

Instant disappointment showed on his face. "Bamboo," he muttered, "and very light. Don't weigh three ounces.

"But look!" he exclaimed. "It is sealed!"

"Listen, Lucien!" There was excitement and something of fear in Curlies voice. "I heard a sound out there in the brush. Like the car going over, or something. It would be bad for us if anything happened to that mule. Wait. I'll be back."

For ten seconds his footsteps from above sent forth a hollow roar within the stone dungeon. Then all was silence. The dull, oppressive stillness of a dungeon on a tropical day hung like a whisper of doom over all.

"It *would* be bad if anything happened to that mule," Lucien murmured as he took up one of the sealed bamboo cylinders to examine it carefully.

Then, of a sudden, he started. It was as if

some one had whispered to him, "Much worse for you if something happened to your friend Curlie!"

"So it would," he thought with a shudder. He stared at the square of light above his head. It was like being in an abandoned cistern. The opening was fully ten feet above his head.

"Not a thing to climb upon." His light swept about in a circle over the floor. "And the rope I came down on lying useless at my feet."

Without attempting to open the curious wax sealed cylinder, he sat down upon a rock to think. Through his mind, as an unwelcome ghost story will sometimes do, was running a strange and weird bit of Maya Indian history which he had heard from Curlie's lips that very day, the story of the Santa Cruz (the ~~Sainted~~ Holy Cross). It was a weird and tragic tale. Even riding as he had been upon a jolting car in broad daylight, it had set his flesh creeping. How much more so now in this

dungeon tomb strewn with the bones of men who had perished long ago.

"The Santa Cruz," he murmured. "May my eyes never behold you."

The ghost would not down. Like many another unwelcome thought, it must be followed through to the end, so think it through he did.

A strange and mysterious people with a great civilization, plantations, palaces, a magnificent temple, and a most terrible religion, were these Maya Indians before the coming of the white man. If rain failed them, if drought dried up their cornfield, if sickness or a great plague overtook them, if they were defeated in battle, if any of these things came to pass, they at once decided that their gods, the gods of the rising sun, the setting sun, of the corn harvest, of war, were displeased. They must be placated. Beautiful maidens, the fairest of the land, were chosen as sacrifices. And to-day their skeletons are found at the bottom of great pools, mute witnesses of the cruel times in which they lived.

Did the Spanish Conquest offer them a better way? Those were fierce times. They offered them the cross, the images of holy saints, of the most holy Virgin. These they must worship, or they must die.

What wonder that, as the years went by, there grew up a religious worship among the Mayas made up from a part of the new and the old. Little wonder that it was, if possible, more cruel than either.

A wooden cross, taken from some Spanish church, had become endowed with miraculous power. It could speak. It knew all things. In time it came to be the judge of the Maya people, and especially was it called upon to condemn or free all prisoners of war who were brought before it.

Who gave it the power of speech? This none could tell.

"And that Santa Cruz (holy cross) once rested against the altar of the very church that looms above me now," Lucien whispered to himself.

"The Santa Cruz," he murmured again. Curlie had told him how, in this very church, when the Indians were in power, haughty Spanish Dons, beautiful Spanish women and more beautiful children had been led to a place before the Santa Cruz, there to bend low and receive sentences of strange and terrible death.

As Lucien sat there now in the gloom of the vault, with dry bones strewn about him, he seemed to hear the soft tread of women's feet, the quick dancing steps of children, the heavy footfall of soldiers, the half audible thud of bended knees, the whistling squeak of the cross which had become an idol dedicated to heathen gods, caught the low moans, then receding footsteps.

"Aha!" he shuddered, shaking himself free from the illusion. "I'd not wish to look upon that Santa Cruz!

"But then," he reassured himself, "Curlie said that nothing had been heard of the Santa Cruz for many years, that it had doubtless lost

its magic power and been destroyed long ago."

In this Curlie was partly wrong.

During his meditations Lucien had quite forgotten the sealed bamboo tube which he had been holding. As he stirred uneasily now it fell from his lap to the floor.

It struck with a crash which started echoes in every corner of the vault and sent a score of bats whirling and snapping about his head.

"Ooo! Ah!" Frightened, Lucien stood there rigid. It was as if the bats had leaped forth from the fallen tube. A glance downward strengthened this illusion. The bamboo tube had split in two.

But what was this? He dropped upon one knee. Beside the two halves of the broken tube was another tube, darker and more ancient in appearance than the outer crust.

"Must have been inside the bamboo," he whispered as he put out a hand to touch this bit of something which, coming from the dim and distant past, inspired within him fresh dreams.

Then, of a sudden, snapping his body to a listening position, he stood rigidly silent. Had he caught the sound of a call, a shout, a shriek? He thought so, but now, during the space of two minutes in which he stood there he caught no sound save the low scrape of a lizard running across the dry floor, and the indescribable rustle of huge ants working somewhere within the wall.

"Something may have happened to Monsieur Curlie Carson," he whispered, "something very terrible indeed."

The thought struck him with the force of a blow on the head. Spinning round, he sat down all in a heap.

"Where am I?" he asked himself, once he had recovered from the shock.

The answer came to him promptly enough. He was in a subterranean vault or dungeon. The dungeon was beneath the floor of a massive old Spanish church. This church, which had weathered the storms of four centuries, which had witnessed joy, laughter, devotion,

prayer, war, anguish and despair, now stood among deserted homes, stores and shops. It was an abandoned church in a deserted city. The city was at the heart of a tropical wilderness on the peninsula of Yucatan.

As the boy thought this through, he felt very small and very much alone. He *was* alone, too. Once thousands had thronged the streets of this city, Santa Cruz de Brava. Thousands, too, had come to worship here, but now no one came to say a prayer.

"Might stay down here a week," he told himself, "a month, perhaps forever."

The thought threw him into a panic.

That he might better control his emotions, he again put out a hand for the curious roll that had fallen from the sealed bamboo cylinder.

"Parchment," he whispered as he removed a thin brown layer.

His fingers trembled with excitement as he turned the parchment over. There was writing upon it. Still his amazement grew.

"Written in French," he murmured. "Who could have dreamed that? This peninsula has belonged to Spain always. The city, this church was built by them.

Written in French! Setting the catch to his flashlight, he thrust it into a jagged niche in the wall where it would shine over his shoulder, then seating himself upon a low rock, all oblivious of the fact that a human skull rolled over at his feet, he began to read.

"Such very old French," he murmured, "all so very ancient. All about buccaneers and gold, silver plate, battles; one does not get the sense of it."

Suddenly his eye caught a number in the corner of the sheet he held. It was a rather large number.

"There are others!" he exclaimed, springing up. "This is the middle, or perhaps the very end. One does not begin so."

At once with excited trembling fingers he attacked the heap of bamboo cylinders. With such force and efficiency did he work that five

minutes had not passed when they lay in fragments all about him. In a neat pile beside him were the parchment rolls.

Beginning then at the one nearest to him, he examined them closely until at last with a cry of triumph he exclaimed:

"Voila! Una!"

At once, after arranging the other rolls in their order, he seated himself and began to read. From that time on the twentieth century did not exist for him. He lived in another world, another time, a world and a century of violence and clash of arms, of Spanish galleons and cutlasses, of scuttled ships, and plundered cities, of pieces of eight, silks, and cloth of gold, of angry seas and an angry world, of defeat and loss, of victory and loot, and finally of treasure, hidden treasure, doubloons, guineas, pieces of eight, treasure which one might perhaps discover.

"Voila!" he breathed. *"Le plus grand! Le plus terriblement!*

"And to think," he breathed, "it was a

Frenchman who wrote all this. To think that here, or here, or here is the poor fellow's bones." His light flashed about the floor of the silent dungeon.

This movement brought him back to himself. He glanced at his watch, then sprang to his feet. He had read for three hours.

A hurried glance upward threw him into consternation.

"*Firme!*" he exclaimed. "Some one has closed the hole!"

A moment's reflection told him this could not be true. To lift the stone trap door, which he and Curlie had discovered quite by accident, had required the last ounce of their combined strength. To drop it down without a sound was impossible.

In sudden consternation he sent a flash of light up there. It was as he had feared. The spot was dark because the great vaulted church was dark, because night had come.

"Night!" he whispered. "And Curlie does not return. Something terrible has happened."

"Those rolls," he exclaimed in a fit of sudden anger. "They have cost me the last moment of daylight!" He began kicking them about, only at last to strike his foot against a skull which, crushing like an eggshell, sent the most horrible echoes resounding through the dungeon and the vaulted church above.

Sobered by this, he sank upon a rock, pressed his hands upon his temples and tried to think.

"What can have happened to Curlie?" he whispered to himself.

He knew well enough what might have happened, yet scarcely dared to think.

CHAPTER IX

THE FACE FROM THE DARK

Before Curlie Carson hurried from the ancient Spanish church there in the heart of Yucatan on the bright tropical afternoon, he might well have paused to stare about him and to recall the story of scenes that had transpired there.

Erected by the Spaniards in the Sixteenth Century, it had witnessed many a scene of triumph, heard many a cry of despair.

Wild, fierce, blood-thirsty, these Spaniards brought to the church shrinking savages and here doomed them to most horrible torture and death because they would not do the bidding of cruel and fanatical priests.

The time came when the tables were turned. Spanish blood was shed. The Spaniards were driven from the land. Spanish men, women,

maidens and children, captured and dragged to this towering edifice, were doomed by Maya Indians to die.

Again the Maya Indians vanished into the bush. Mexicans ruled the city. Miserable wretches, men, women and children were herded together here. The church had become a prison.

All this had passed, and now, at this moment, as Curlie stood there, the wild deer, the jaguar, little grunting wild pigs and poisonous snakes ruled the city which the jungle was fast taking back to itself. And yet there were human beings who, from time to time, haunted the ruins.

Unconquered, the wild Mayas, Santa Cruz Indians as they were called, fierce little brown people who in the past, hating Spaniards and Mexicans alike, had lain in ambush to attack and destroy, had waylaid trains to drag men and women into the jungle. These little brown people still haunted the jungle and, for all Curlie knew, were ready enough to drag all

white persons who came their way before some ancient heathen priest, there to condemn them to death.

The boys had been told that no Indians were about at this time of the year, also that they hated only Spaniards and Mexicans. But in this wild land one may hear anything.

Curlie did not pause to think of these things. His thoughts were centered on a small mule tied to a rusty railway switch a little way around the corner. If anything were to happen to that mule; if he were to be stolen; if the Indians got him; if he escaped; or if a jaguar dragged him into the jungle, then the thirty miles of brush-grown, snake infested, swampy railway track that lay between them and the nearest Mexican village must be covered on foot.

"And that," thought the boy as he hurried on, "would not be so good.

"Ought not to have come, I suppose," he grumbled to himself, "but there was Lucien's dream of treasure and the things treasure

would give him. And there was the city—an abandoned city. Where's the fellow who could resist such a lure?"

As he hurried on his mind dwelt upon the joys of exploring such a city. To wander over the brush-grown promenade, to sit on the stone seats of the plaza, to picture the laughing maidens, the joyous children who, in days gone by, had come to play there; to wander into the abandoned shops whose doors stand invitingly ajar, to climb the stairs of palatial mansions, to gaze dreamily from the windows of chambers where once fair, brown-eyed senoritas greeted the light of a new day.

"And then the treasure. Of course there is treasure hidden here. Time and again the inhabitants, overcome, driven back by a victorious enemy, have left this city in haste. They left much behind. What gold and silver plate, what rich jewels, what weight of doubloons, of pieces of eight and castellanos might be buried beneath the walls, in the cellars or the gardens of this abandoned city? What might

not the ravages of time, the wild burst of hurricanes, the slow wear of winds, sun and rain have brought to light?

"Probably nothing wrong with the mule," he told himself as he rounded a building which had once been a prosperous and gay shop. "Probably just imagined I heard something."

He slowed down. One always slows down in the tropics. "Manana" (tomorrow) is the by-word of the land.

A thin film appeared to settle over his eyes. The dreamy hush of late afternoon hung over all. The city, like some good natured giant in rags, lay sleeping in the sun. From the crest of a palm tree there came the creaking notes of a tropical bird.

Soaring high, as if loathe to leave a city that no longer offered them carrion, three vultures slowly swept the sky.

Suddenly Curlie started. Then, wide awake, hurried forward.

"That's queer." The words came quick

and short. "Tied him there to the switch. Tied him securely. Now he's gone."

It was no use looking or wondering, either. The mule and the rusty wheeled car were gone.

"Gone!" he murmured. "Gone!" To his mind's eye came the picture of their tramp back to the last ragged outpost of civilization. His mind was staggered by the thought.

"Napoleon's retreat from Moscow was easy beside what's ahead of us," he breathed.

Suddenly his thoughts broke short off, and he went racing down the track. From somewhere back in the brush he had caught the grind of a rusty wheel.

"Catch him yet," he panted.

The car to which the mule was hitched was a four wheeled affair much like a hand car without handles. Its wheels ran on the rusty track of the abandoned railroad. The mule made the best shift he could at getting through the brush growing between the rails. It had been slow business coming in.

As Curlie thought of this he quickened his pace. He must catch that mule. He couldn't see how he had gotten loose. He must be caught, all the same.

He had followed down the track for a half mile, had gotten well into the brush, and had, he thought, caught his first glimpse of the mule when something very disturbing happened. Over to the right of him had sounded a low shrill whistle. From in front of him had come an answer. Both to the left and directly behind him, as if agitated by a strong wind, the bushes began swaying. There was no wind. No tropical bird he had ever heard of whistled in that way.

"It's disturbing," he told himself. "But what's a fellow to do? We must have that mule. Can't go back. Besides, there's the rustling back there too."

It was curious. The hair began rising at the back of his neck. But still he pressed on.

"Ah, there he is!" he sighed. "Have him in a minute."

He did not have him in a minute, nor in an hour. A moment later, when he put his hand out to touch the car, something with the apparent weight and force of a sack of sand whirling through space struck him squarely in the middle of the back. He went down flat, to lie there motionless.

"Jaguar," was his last fleeting thought. Then his mind went blank.

When he came to himself he did not attempt to arise at once. Instead, he lay there listening, trying to bring back broken bits of memory and to piece them together.

"There was a mule and a church," he thought. "Lucien is in a hole, dark hole. Must get him out. He's tied to the switch. No, not Lucien, but the cart. Not the cart, but the mule. There's brush on the track. The cart creaks. Seems as if I could hear it now."

He listened. He did hear something, a queer creaking and grinding sound. He opened his eyes. He was lying on the ground. A short distance away, seated upon a palm

leaf mat, was a brown-eyed girl. She was clad in a one piece dress of faultless white linen. Her cheeks, her neck, were as fair as his own. She was as white as he was. Yet he was sure she was an Indian.

Suddenly it all came back to him.

"I was attacked by a man eating jaguar," he told himself. "These Indians saved me."

He lifted himself to a sitting position. With sudden astonishment, he discovered that his feet were tied.

"Did they save me?" he thought. "I wonder. Perhaps they did. But, however that may be, they don't trust me."

Suddenly the words of a British friend from Honduras came back to him. "They are friendly to Americans and to our people, but death to Mexicans and Spaniards."

"Death to Spaniards," he thought to himself.

Why not? For a thousand, two thousand, perhaps many thousands of years their ancestors labored at the task of building a great

civilization. Hundreds of thousands toiled at building magnificent cities, all of stone. Kings' palaces, temples, pyramids a hundred feet high. All these were the works of their hands. Even to-day their massive ruins are everywhere.

They quarreled among themselves. They fought long and bloody wars. Fierce tribes brought in to aid them finally became their conquerors. They had thrown off this hated rule, and were fighting their way back, when to their shores came the Spaniards, the terrible Conquestadors. Then, their cities sacked and destroyed, their cornfields laid waste, they were driven back into the bush. And here they are to-day. Why should they not hate the Spaniard and his descendant, the Mexican?

"Friendly to American," Curlie thought. "But how are these wild people to know that I am an American? How am I, who know not one Maya word, to tell them?"

Here indeed was a problem. He sat for a

time studying his surroundings. Then he felt himself over carefully.

"It's curious," he whispered to himself. "One would think that a jaguar's claws would leave a mark, yet I haven't a scratch upon me. My clothes are not torn. I have a lame back where something landed upon me from behind, that's all."

He closed his eyes for a moment to think. He was tired and sleepy. It had been a long hard day. It was night now.

"Could fall asleep," he told himself, "but I must not. Who knows what may happen? Besides, I'm hungry."

He opened his eyes again. A savory odor had come to him. Over a half burnt out fire bent the form of an old woman. Her face was bronzed and wrinkled, her hands knotted with toil. She was browning a wild turkey over the coals.

On a large flat rock which had evidently been drawn red hot from the fires, the fair faced girl was cooking corn cakes.

"Getting dinner," he thought. "Of course some of it is for me."

There were many Indians. At least he believed there were. He counted eleven near this campfire. Through the narrow clearing, where only cocoanut palms remained standing, other fires gleamed.

This particular camp was located on the slope of a ridge. A short way from him a spring fed stream trickled over the rocks. At the back of him were great boulders and, he believed, something of a cliff.

He took in all these details carefully. "For," he said to himself, "who can say what knowledge is likely to be of service to me in the future?"

As he watched the peaceful scene before him, the young women and the mothers preparing supper, the men lying about the fire, three children sitting in a triangle, playing some game he did not understand, he said to himself, "Surely these people would do no harm."

How little he knew of what was yet in store for him.

* * * * *

In the meantime Lucien was having a sad time of it. Curlie did not return. It was not his privilege to watch a browning turkey sizzling on the spit, nor to smell corn cakes baking. In his dungeon were many bones, the bones of men dead these two hundred years. There was nothing to eat and, so far as he could tell, no way out. True, there were bats, ugly snapping creatures, and a lizard or two. But Lucien had not come to like lizard meat, either cooked or raw.

He was not, however, easily disturbed. With his father, Pier Ducas, he had visited many strange places and had, at times, suffered much.

As for the dry bones, they might rest in peace. The son of a naturalist sees many dry bones.

Matters did not improve. They grew worse. Of a sudden a sound smote the dead silence

of those vaulted chambers—the sound of footsteps.

"Strangers," he told himself with a shudder. "Three of them. Not one of them is Curlie; boots too heavy.

"Ah well," he thought, "I am safe enough down here. They will never find me."

A thought suddenly struck him and he sprang to his feet. Without the aid of his light he began silently groping his way back into the farthest corner. They had dug the trap door up from the debris that covered it. These strangers, whoever they might be, had beyond doubt been ignorant of its existence. Now, if they discovered it open, would they not wish to explore? And if they did? He shuddered, and slunk far back into the corner.

Lucien feared the Indians a little. There was one other class of men he feared still more. During the last years of the Mexican occupancy of this city the church had been used as a prison. Criminals of the worst sort had been housed here. Many of these had

escaped to the bush. Some were known to be still at large. "These," he told himself, "are greatly to be feared."

When at last a torch was thrust down through the opening he was so surprised and shocked by the apparition that came into the red circle of light that he barely escaped crying out in surprise and fear.

Catching himself, he sat there rigid, motionless. He closed his eyes. "I have been reading of buccaneers in that ancient manuscript," he told himself. "I may be dreaming."

But no, as he opened his eyes the apparition was still there. It was the perfect reproduction in life of an ancient woodcut that hung in Lucien's room at home, the picture of Blackbeard. The man above seemed every inch a buccaneer.

"Risen from the dead," the boy thought.

With tangled black hair, a long black beard, gleaming teeth, bloodshot eyes, knives and a revolver at his belt, the man lacked but one

thing—a blade between his teeth—to become a boarding buccaneer.

What the picture lacked the flaring red torch made up. It painted everything a deep blood red—the man, the walls, the grinning skulls at the bottom of the dungeon.

For a full moment the man stared into the still depths beneath him. The torch did not illuminate the far corners. Having seen only bones and two skulls, the man, grinning terribly, threw his head back over his shoulder to speak to his companions. He spoke in a strange tongue.

After one more glance into the dungeon, the stranger drew back his torch.

A moment later there came a grating sound as some heavy object was drawn over the floor.

"Going to close the hole," was Lucien's mental comment. At once his mind was in a whirl. If they closed that opening, his doom was sealed. Curlie, even though he returned, could not lift that stone door. It had required their combined strength to remove it.

CHAPTER X

THE SANTA CRUZ

Badly as he was frightened, greatly as he feared the pirate-like being who had but the moment before withdrawn his head from the entrance to the dungeon, Lucien had resolved to cry out for help, to stop the closing of the dungeon, when of a sudden the scraping sound ceased. A heavy thud followed. Then came the sound of retreating footsteps.

The strangers, having to all appearances decided that the closing of that door was a needless waste of energy, had dropped it to the floor and departed. They had gone, no doubt, to attend to the business of the hour.

"Whatever that business may be," Lucien shuddered. "I can't think that it is anything very good."

At once his mind returned to the problem of

Curlie's mysterious disappearance. He wondered whether these buccaneers had been responsible for some evil that had overtaken his companion.

* * * * *

At this very moment, with no knowledge of the strange visitations at the ancient church, Curlie Carson sat studying the hempen knots that bound his feet.

"Shall I attempt to untie them?" he asked himself.

A swift survey of the faces about him brought him up with a slight shock. Covertly, yet none the less surely, two young men sitting close by were watching him.

"If I try it, they'll be upon me at once," he told himself. Slowly was being borne in upon him the conviction that it had been one of these men and not a jaguar that had leaped upon him from an overhanging palm.

"But why?" he whispered.

Again there came to him that breath taking realization that these little copper colored men

could not distinguish him from a Mexican, that they were death to all Mexicans, and that he had not one word with which to enlighten them.

The dinner was at last prepared. A great heap of corn cake lay upon a palm leaf. The turkey was done to a turn.

With a keen bladed machete the oldest man of the group carved the turkey. The deft manner in which he handled the clumsy two foot blade sent a chill up Curlie's spine.

"He's as skilled in its use as a barber with a razor. Man! Think what an enemy!" he whispered to himself with an inward shudder.

Hot corn cakes were passed about. Smoking sweet potatoes were dragged from the coals; turkey meat went from hand to hand. So the feast began. And, as yet, Curlie had only the sight of food with which to break his long fast.

At last the eyes of that girl who wore a spotless white gown fell upon him. Slowly, calmly, her deep brown eyes surveyed him.

Then, of a sudden, as if discovering in him a long lost companion of early childhood, she smiled. With a deft twirl she tossed him a smoking hot potato.

"Found a friend," thought the boy. Immediately he experienced a great sense of relief. Such is the feeling of one who, in the midst of a strange and threatening throng, suddenly discovers the face of an old friend.

All too soon he was to need this sense of a friend at hand. As his eyes wandered from rock to tree, from tree to reclining human figures, they were suddenly arrested by an unusual object which stood beneath an ancient palm.

One look was enough. At once his heart paused in its beating, to go racing at double speed. He was now hot, now cold. He felt an all but unconquerable desire to struggle to his feet, to stumble away into the brush.

"The Santa Cruz!" he whispered. At last, with cold perspiration standing out on his forehead, he sank back in his place.

"The Santa Cruz," he thought more soberly. "There can be no doubt of it. There are the peculiar markings on the right arm of it, and on the left the cut by a Spaniard's machete."

The Santa Cruz! What tales he had heard told about sunny plazas and blazing campfires —stories of this same "Sainted Cross" of the Mayas! What crimes had been committed, what blood spilled, what fair bodies hacked in pieces at the command of this "Sainted Cross," for, if tales and legends were true, this Santa Cruz could talk. Within its power lay the sentence of life or death.

Over Curlie this cross, a plain affair of wood, standing some three feet from the ground and faintly illuminated now by four smouldering torches, wove a spell of horror.

And why should it not? Had he not, with his own ears, heard from the lips of an aged Englishman of Belize in British Honduras the story of his visit with other Englishmen to these Santa Cruz Indians? Had he not been

told how, sent on an errand of mercy, these Englishmen had gone to intercede in the interests of some Spanish settlers? Had he not been told how, the Spaniards in rows, men, women, beautiful maidens from great families, and many small children, tied hand to hand, had been made to bow before the Santa Cruz, and how this same cruel " Sainted Cross " had condemned them all to death? With tears streaming down his face from the very recollection, the old man had told Curlie all this.

" It is rumored," the old man had finished, " that a Spaniard condemned to die some years ago, escaping from his captors, seized a machete and hacked this hated Maya idol into pieces. If this is true, then God be praised!

" It is said by others that he struck but one blow, hacking away a bit from the right arm, and that thereupon a Maya severed his head from his body. Who knows? The hated cross may still hold sway in the jungle.

" You will understand," the old man had ended, " I am not against the true religion, nor

the real Cross. This is not religion. It is a savage, heathen idolatry grafted onto a sacred symbol. It is not a cross, but an idol."

"But the cross?" Curlie had asked. "Did it truly speak?"

"It made some sort of weird sound. I, of course, could not understand. There was some chicanery about it, I'll be bound. Perhaps one of those diabolical rascals, the priests of these savage rites, was a ventriloquist. Who can say it was not so?"

"The Santa Cruz," Curlie whispered, after thinking this all through. "The Santa Cruz." Then of a sudden he began to shake as with the ague. "The Santa Cruz pronounces sentences of life or doom to prisoners. I am a prisoner. Will it pronounce my doom tonight?"

For a time, with nerves totally shattered, he lay there trembling from head to foot. Then, shaking himself vigorously, he whispered:

"Let it pronounce, if it needs must. There is always a way of escape. I will find it."

"But after all," he thought quite soberly, "will I?"

There came times in Curlie Carson's life when something within him appeared to demand a reason for certain courses of action. He had arrived at just such a position now. It was as if there dwelt within him another self who was whispering:

"Why did you do this? Why did you come with that French boy to the heart of this jungle? Why did you risk so much to visit an abandoned city?"

Why was it? Was it love of adventure? Curiosity? Was it the joy of an explorer making his way to some ancient ruins? These had entered in, but were not the great reason.

"The great reason," he pondered. Ah yes, now he had it.

"Treasure." This single word trembled unspoken at the tip of his tongue.

But why treasure? Treasure for whom? A boy alone in the world, with no one looking to him for aid, and endowed with plenty of wits

to care for himself, has little enough use for treasure.

Before his mind's eye there flashed a moving picture, the picture of a young girl of sixteen, flaxen haired, clad in white, dancing down a green meadow which lay before a stately old French chateau. Back of the chateau was pasture land, and rearing high above this a tall hill where dark forests hung high in air.

Curlie had never seen all this. He had never visited France. Lucien, the French boy had painted the picture for him, had done it with such beautiful words that he could see it all now.

"And that," he told himself, "was all theirs, Lucien's and his father's and the girl's."

The girl was Jeanne. The estate, which had been handed down for generations, had belonged to Lucien's grandfather. Lucien and his sister had played there as children.

"Must be wonderful to have a sister and a

grandfather, and to play in a green meadow," thought Curlie. " The meadow is still there, but the grandfather is gone. First the war took his chateau, then the angel of death came to bear the grandfather away."

The chateau and the meadow belonged to another. Lucien and his sister were welcome there no longer. In the long, low room lined with books, where the sun sent in its last golden glow at sunset, others sat. In the garden where twisted pear trees, like hiding robbers, stood against a stone wall, other children planted flowers. At the edge of the dark forest where at times a wild deer appeared in the moonlight, other children thrilled at thought of bears that might be hiding there. The estate that should have belonged to Lucien's father and in time to Lucien himself was lost to them.

But not for good, perhaps. The fanciful Lucien was always dreaming of finding treasure, Spanish treasure, Indian treasure, buccaneer treasure, any treasure at all, so long as

there was enough to buy back his ancestral estate, so long as he and his most beautiful sister might wander once more in the meadow, sit in the library at sunset or explore the dark forest.

This had been Lucien's dream. Curlie had entered into the dream heart and soul. A young soldier of fortune, he had joined a knight in his search for gold.

And why not treasure? In all ages, centuries back, had not Maya priest and Spanish lords buried treasure in ancient ruins? Why might they not hope to find it?

"At any rate," Curlie said grimly to the other self within him, "that's why we came. That's why I'm here."

The self within him appeared satisfied with this. Curlie was left to plot, as best he could, his escape from these perilous surroundings.

* * * * *

The last echoes of the footsteps, that apparently had come from out of the past, had scarcely died away when Lucien began cast-

ing about for a means of escape from the dark and gloomy dungeon.

At first he could think of nothing. Flash his light about, search the place from corner to corner, rack his brain as he might, he could see only stone walls and a vaulted ceiling where far above him one small dark aperture gloomed.

Then, as his eyes fell upon one of the rocks that lay among the bones upon the floor, a thought struck him all of a heap.

"Why not?" he exclaimed. Rushing to the corner, he seized the light rope with which he had lowered himself into the dungeon. One end of this he quickly knotted about a rock half the size of his head. Then, after coiling the rope in his left hand, he seized the rock with his right. Aiming squarely at the dark opening above, he threw the stone with all his might. It struck with a heavy thud on the floor above. Lucien started, then listened with all his ears. To him the sound of its fall was little short of an explosion. The wild

whirl of bats' wings immediately became a tumult. What if those fierce looking buccaneer people were camping near the church? What if they heard and returned? He scarcely knew which he dreaded most, a night in that dismal place, or the return of those terror inspiring men.

Fifteen minutes he waited. All was silence again. No sound came from above. Taking courage again, he pulled gently upon the rope. It gave. The stone rolling upon the floor above awakened echoes anew.

Whipping the rope into a jagged corner of the opening which was roughly made in the form of a square, he pulled again. Again the rope gave, the rock rolled. One more pull, and the rock came crashing down upon the dungeon floor.

"Can't expect to succeed at once," he told himself as he began again to coil the rope for a throw.

For two full hours he worked at this business of coiling the rope and tossing up rocks.

He tried smaller rocks than the first, larger ones, too, but in the end they all came crashing back.

All? Not quite all, for in the end, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he pulled upon the rope it gave, then stuck and held. This was what he wanted. With the rope caught in a jagged niche, with the stone above to hold it in place, he might hope to climb to freedom.

With breath coming short and quick, he tested the hold of the rope. It would sustain his weight. More, only time could tell.

CHAPTER XI

THE SANTA CRUZ SPEAKS

With a prayer on his lips that he might at last have found a way out, Lucien bound the roll of ancient parchment upon his back and gripping the rope, began to climb.

It was a difficult task. Once the rope, slipping, came near to sending him crashing down. In the end it held. Reaching the rocky edge of the opening, he took a firm hold, wrapped the rope about his feet and hung there, breathing hard and listening.

No sound save the weird snap-snap of bats struck his ears. With a final effort he battled his way over the rim, to fall panting on the floor above.

The abandoned city, as he saw it fifteen minutes later, bathed in wonderful tropical moonlight, seemed weird indeed.

The stores, the humble homes, the castles,

the plaza, the ancient church. "Is it," he thought, "possible that all these are deserted and dead? Surely those windows will be thrown open to the morning sun. Surely women will swarm toward the market places. Surely early mass will be sung."

"*Mais Non,*" (But no) he breathed, "It will never be again."

Then, remembering with a sudden shock that he had had neither food nor drink for many hours, he became all in an instant very hungry and thirsty.

In the plaza he had seen a tree laden with golden fruit.

"Perhaps it is good to eat," he told himself as he turned his footsteps thither.

He was not alone in the night. A small rabbit hopped across his path. A buzzard in a nearby palm quarreled sleepily with his mate. As he rounded a corner a small brown deer, leaping into a moonlit opening, stood there alert, graceful, expectant, then went bounding away.

"How magnificent it all is," he breathed. "And yet, how dangerous. Where can Curlie Carson be?"

To his great surprise and momentary disappointment, he found that the tree in the plaza was a grapefruit tree.

"Bitter," he thought.

He was mistaken. When he had stripped the peeling from one great yellow ball which lay beneath the tree, he found it as sweet as an orange. True, a suggestion of bitterness was there, but a mere twang that only added to the treat.

"Fine," he murmured. Seating himself upon a stone bench, he ate until hunger and thirst were gone.

Then rising, he made his way toward the station where they had left the mule.

But the mule was not there.

"I wonder what could have happened," he thought. "Where is Curlie? Where is the mule?"

As if in answer to his question, faint and

from far away, yet unmistakably clear, there came the old familiar " He-Haw, He-Haw " of that mule.

* * *

No stranger stage was ever set than that which was prepared by the Maya campfire after the feast that night. No more weird religious rites were ever performed. No more uncanny light ever burned than the yellow-green of the torches set to illumine the Santa Cruz. No more inhuman, supernatural being ever appeared in wild religious rites than the priest who came to perform the rites of the Santa Cruz.

Curlie Carson, sitting well back in the shadows, his hands tied now as well as his feet, felt himself stirred and chilled to the very center of his being.

By a trick of reflected light, the Santa Cruz had been transformed into a thing of living green fire. Illumined by the reflected light from the cross, the wrinkled and wizened face of the ancient priest, whose very features

seemed carved from stone, took on the aspect of carved green marble in a vaulted tomb.

Sitting in the shadows, Curlie felt strangely alone. Suddenly he remembered the girl who had given him food. "Surely," he thought, "she will creep back here and cut my hands."

He thought of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas. Such things as happened to John Smith, he was soon enough to know, happen oftenest in history and the movies. Creeping close to the Santa Cruz, his fair Indian maiden was waiting eager as the rest for the words of the Santa Cruz, words which would give him freedom or seal his doom.

The words were long in coming. A half hour passed, an hour. The torches sputtered low. The moon painted a patch of green and gold before the Santa Cruz.

Then, as they all sat leaning forward, staring eagerly, there came a weird squawking and whistling. The Santa Cruz was speaking. Not a breath, not a sigh escaped the lips of the listeners.

Curlie understood not a word. Yet, from the terror-inspiring tones, from the grim visages of the listeners, he knew what words were being said.

"My doom is sealed!" He felt a hot tremor shoot up his spine. "It is sealed, unless——"

He hesitated. Had the time come to act? His hands and feet were tied. Struggle as he might, he could not loosen those hempen bands.

But what was this? The aged priest, after removing the torches, and having stirred up the campfire, was passing out handfuls of leaves. Some of these the Mayas fashioned into little cylinders. Others were hurriedly stuffed by nervous fingers into ancient pipes.

"First they take a smoke," thought Curlie.

He was puzzled. Why was this? Surely it could not be the pipe of peace! He was soon enough to know.

Coals of fire gleamed as the pipes were lighted. Lazy curls of smoke drifted his way.

Startled, he sniffed the air again and again.

This was not tobacco smoke. It was a strange, haunting odor. He had smelled it before, somewhere.

Closing his eyes, he allowed imagination to drift at will. Rich stores of suggestion carried him back. He was in a strange city den. A group of young people were sitting by a table, smoking. The smoke that come from their cigarettes was strange.

"What are they smoking?" he had asked his companion.

"Hashish," his friend had whispered back.

Fascinated, he had watched the effect of that malicious and powerful drug. At first, half frightened by the evil and threatening look of the victims who, leaping to their feet, danced with animation and apparently without fatigue, he had gripped the arm of his seat in silence.

Then, one by one, the dancing couples ceased their wild gyrations to sink into seats and lose themselves at once in senseless stupor.

"Hashish, a drug, the leaves of a plant," he now whispered to himself.

Like a flash, he saw it all. He had been condemned by the Santa Cruz, or by the wicked priest who spoke through it. These savages were smoking hashish which would make them brave, heartless, mad. Then, with the cruel machetes he would be hacked to pieces.

In his boyhood, slimmer, more supple than his companions, Curlie had excelled in certain athletic activities. There was one stunt in which he had been supreme. It was easy then. Could he do it now?

"Then it was for fun," he thought. "Now it is for my life."

With a quick movement, he threw himself upon his back. By great good fortune, no one at that moment looked his way. The gentle slope behind would aid him. His feet shot in air. The next moment, with both hands and feet tied, he was rolling like a barrel hoop down the gentle incline.

He landed at last, feet first, upon a rock. The next instant he lost his balance, to go gliding down a steep incline. With a jolt that set his teeth rattling, he came up short against a pile of sharp and jagged boulders.

From above there came wild shouting. What had happened? Had they missed him? Would they come swarming over the cliff to drag him back to a terrible death? Madly, but vainly, he struggled against his bonds.

But no. As he listened he detected in the shouting a sort of wild cadence.

"Singing," he sighed. "Singing to work up their courage. They haven't missed me yet."

With time for calmer thoughts, he found a way out. The rocks about him had sharp and jagged edges. Why might they not cut his bonds? A moment of struggling about, and his hands were in position. A few frantic efforts left his hands bruised and bleeding, but free. Less time elapsed before his feet, too, were loosed.

Coming out from behind a cloud, the moon revealed a sort of crooked path that led to a green jungle a hundred feet below. Five minutes later he was in the jungle.

"They'll never find me now," he thought.

The shouting was growing fainter. Soon bereft of their senses by that terrible stupifying drug, they would lie sprawled about the fire.

"And then, with a single machete I might kill them all." The thought sent a shudder through his frame. "Who wants to kill?"

"But the Santa Cruz? It came near being my death. I might destroy that.

"But after all it would do no good," he concluded. "It is but a thing of wood, a symbol of ignorance and superstition and hate. Destroy this symbol, and they will find some other. It would not be worth the risk I would have to run."

Having arrived at this conclusion, he set about the task of finding his way around the foot of the hill to a path which he hoped

might lead him back to the deserted city and to his good French pal, Lucien.

* * *

After battling his way through the low brush that grew between the ties of the railway track, Lucien had come upon the mule and the flat car. In attempting to reach a particularly tempting bit of fodder, the mule had overturned the car. In this position the car would not budge, and since, even by the lustiest kicking, the mule could not free himself from the stout rawhide traces, he had settled down to the task of eating all the brush within his reach. He had cleared a wide circle when the French boy found him.

"*Bon!*" exclaimed the boy. "Here you are. But now where is our good friend Curlie Carson?"

To this question the mule made no answer.

Having righted the car and set it upon the track again, Lucien tied the mule to a stout shrub, then searched about in the bushes for

a rolled up mosquito bar canopy which had been left upon the car.

After a quarter of an hour's search he retrieved this treasure. By setting up two stakes, he was able to mount the canopy upon the car. Then, because he could think of nothing better to do, he stretched himself out beneath the canopy and fell asleep, fatigued to exaustion by his experience in the dungeon.

He was awakened some time later from blissful dreams. The cause of his plunge into present reality had been the sudden forward lurch of the car.

Feeling the onward jolt of the car, he sat up unsteadily to find himself staring at a pair of narrow shoulders that, hunched forward as they were, appeared to hang over the mule. As for the mule, he was leaping forward and gaining time at every bound.

"Ah! Curlie!" exclaimed the delighted French boy. "Where have you been? What have you seen?"

"Seen enough!" grumbled Curlie. "Get on there, you beast of Balaam! I'll show the world how a Yankee skins a mule." This last was addressed to the brown beast before him, who at once appeared to double his speed.

Swaying from side to side, the car promised at any moment to jump the track and land in the ditch. Thinking little or nothing of this, Curlie still urged the mule forward.

"We'll have breakfast on the coast, or I'll know the reason why!" he grumbled. "I'm done with this jungle. We saw a deserted city. What was that? Bah! Nothing. What have we to show for it? Nothing! Bah!"

"But you said you had seen enough," persisted the French boy.

"So I have. I've seen that which few white men have seen and still lived to tell the story. See here!" He turned squarely about. "I've seen the Santa Cruz. The Santa Cruz! Do you understand? Been condemned to die, too. But am I dead? Do I seem a corpse?

"Get on there, Balaam! Get on, I tell you! They're drugged, but that won't last forever. Get on down that rusty track!

"Yes," he turned to Lucien, "we have seen a deserted city. But what of that? What have we to show for it?"

"This," said Lucien, holding up the bulky roll of parchment.

"What is it?" asked Curlie in surprise.

"It is a very valuable manuscript. The history of the buccaneers, written by one of their own number, whose bones lie there in the dungeon."

"What does it say?"

"The French is very old. The writing, though distinct, is very dim. My light was poor. I have read some. Much I have not read. It is a very valuable manuscript. My father will read it and translate it! It will be printed both in French and in English. There is but one such history in the world. This one is better, more vivid, more complete, I am sure."

Curlie, who had little enough interest in ancient writings, who lived for the present alone, made no answer, but again began berating the mule whose gait had fallen off to a lazy trot.

"There was a mention of treasure," Lucien said.

"Treasure!" exclaimed Curlie.

"Treasure hidden on an island, an island with a strange name and of a name cut on a tree. It is very old French, not very clear to me. The light was bad. Father will read it to us."

"Treasure!" exclaimed Curlie. "A treasure hunt. Buccaneers' treasure! Adventure! Further adventure!"

"Adventure?" repeated the French boy, somewhat drowsily. "I have had quite enough of adventure."

"That," said Curlie, "is one thing of which there is never quite enough. Treasure? Did you say treasure? An island? Name carved upon a tree?"

Lucien did not reply. He had fallen asleep. And so the car jolted on through the night until dawn came, and with the dawn a glimpse of the wide open free sea, the home of mystery, of search and many a wild adventure.

"An island. Buccaneers' treasure. A name carved upon a tree," Curlie whispered sleepily as he climbed from the car and made his way to their waiting boat.

CHAPTER XII

BROUGHT IN BY THE TIDE

In the meantime Jeanne had not been idle. Like the good King Arthur, she had continued to dream. Nor did she stop at dreaming. In the spare hours when she was not needed at her father's side, she visited the turtle nets of Petillo, the needy fisherman who lay ill in his bamboo shack. This task completed, she would give the tiller into Camene's hand, then, sitting erect in the prow, for all the world like a great brown figurehead, she would scan the coral reefs as they skimmed along the shallows. Mile after mile passed before her, but not a spar, nor a barnacle encrusted beam showed itself above the surface to reward their search for the ancient wreck of a Spanish treasure ship.

There were times when the girl told herself

that her search was a fanciful dream, made of such stuff as night mists and soap bubbles are fashioned from. At other times, especially at night under the stars, she could see quite plainly the bold prow and bellying sails of the staunch old ships. At times she fancied she heard the clank of chains, the shouts of men.

"The world is old," she would whisper to herself. "The time might seem long since that ship went upon the reefs. But it was not long; only yesterday."

Then came the night when, drifting with the tide over a breathless sea, she made a startling find.

Camene was telling her for the twentieth time the story of the great batle of St. George's cay.

"There were twelve ships—twelve Spanish ships of war, and the British wood cutters had but one, one ship and some tiny forts on the cay.

"Oh, but they were brave!" The girl her-

self was a descendant of "the very log cutter who had led his band to victory."

"There were twelve ships," she went on softly. "Then on the horizon there appeared another. Thirteen. That's unlucky, Miss Jeanne, very, very unlucky. And the thirteenth was the treasure ship of the Spanish fleet. They came on, straight on. They—"

"Camene!" exclaimed Jeanne. "What's that over in the water?"

"Where?"

"Right over there toward Cutlass Cay."

"Probably only a cocoanut."

"Looks like some one swimming. Pull in the anchor. Let's go see."

They did go see. Each stroke added to their amazement. The thing was not a cocoanut; not a human being, either. Or if it were, then surely a very strange swimmer, for it stood far forward, half out of the water, and bobbing gently up with every rising wavelet.

"And yet it has the form of a human

being." There was mystery in Jeanne's tone. "See! There is a head, and shoulders. What can it be?"

A few bold strokes, and they were alongside. Then Camene burst into merry laughter.

"A wooden lady," she cried.

Jeanne did not laugh. She drew the "wooden lady" close to the boat and examined it with such painstaking care that Camene was awed into silence.

"Camene," said Jeanne at last, "this is no common wood carver's work. Old, salt encrusted and black as it is, it shows very fine lines. It is the work of a master carver. At one time this lady rode proudly at the prow of some ancient ship. She was that ship's figurehead. It was from her and from her good angel that protection was expected to come in times of battle and storm."

Hardly had she said this when she started and stared off to sea. A thought had struck her all of a heap.

"Camene," her tone was low and tense, "can this be the figurehead of the treasure ship?"

"Who knows?"

"If it is," said Jeanne, now wildly excited, "it must mean that the sands on the reefs have shifted, that the figurehead has been uncovered and torn away by the waves, that the prow of the ship may at this moment lie uncovered somewhere along the reefs."

"I know a man who may be able to tell us," said Camene.

"Tell us what?"

"Tell us if this is the treasure ship's figurehead. He lives in a bay, on an island, not so far away. He is very old, very old—a hundred years, perhaps. Many old ships have been brought to him. He has beached them and burned them for the copper that is in them. But he has always saved their figureheads. There they stand. I have seen them, ghosts from ships that have vanished long ago. Oh yes, he can tell us."

"We will see him," Jeanne said solemnly. "We will go tomorrow."

It was a weird cabin that the girls entered the next afternoon. The walls were all of wood panels. The varnish on them, blistered and cracked by who knows how many suns, seemed as rough and uneven as the back of some crocodile.

The subdued light came from narrow windows, taken from a ship's cabin, and from a huge skylight in the roof. This too had been taken from some forgotten schooner.

"The place looks for all the world as if a real ship had sunk to her hurricane deck in the sand so that only the cabin there remained," Jeanne told herself.

The cabin was strange, but no less strange were its contents. In one corner were ancient weapons, blunderbusses, cutlasses, two mounted cannons of bronze, and countless rifles of years long gone. In another corner was a heap of ship's instruments, sextants, compasses, telescopes, all corroded and green

with age. Two huge anchors took up a great amount of space, which three great ship's chests appeared to begrudge them.

The man who came forward to meet them seemed a part of it all.

"Father Time, Rip Van Winkle and the Ancient Mariner all in one," Jeanne thought to herself.

"Ship's heads?" The old man's voice was high and squeaky like the complaint of a rusty hinge. "Yes, I have many. Want to buy?"

"Only to see them, please," said Jeanne.

"Oh, to see them. Very well, you are welcome. They are back here." He twisted a great brass handle. A ship's door swung out. Before them was an open shed filled from end to end with a strange and grotesque array of figures carved in wood.

Awed into silence the two girls stood there before the motley array of carved images, last remaining trace of great winged birds of the sea that sailed the Spanish Main so bravely and so well.

As Jeanne closed her eyes she could see the proud prows of great ships, a whole fleet of them. Here a stately hull with towering pyramids of canvas; there lofty trucks and clipper bow, and here a graceful, fast flying schooner, riding gayly before the wind.

"What tales these wooden images might tell," she thought to herself. "Tales of hard masters, bitter cruelty and mutiny on the high seas; of buccaneers boarding ships at dead of night, of brave seamen walking the plank at break of day."

"See!" she exclaimed to Camene. "Yonder is a Roman soldier, and here is Napoleon. Surely this ship sailed from our own beloved France."

"Ah yes." The old man smiled and rubbed his hands together. "From France. But you French people, you love more dearly your Joan de Arc. You would perhaps buy this one." He pointed to a well preserved, carefully carved figurehead of the sainted Joan in all her brave armor.

"No," said Jeanne, "I will not buy to-day."

"He is a miser," whispered Camene. "He loves gold more than all else. They say he has hidden away great heaps of gold. His father hunted ancient Spanish treasure, buccaneers' treasure. Yes, and found it too. He knows many tales of treasure not yet found, does this man. Searches for it, too."

"But look!" exclaimed Jeanne. "It is like that one! Almost exactly like it." She pointed a trembling finger at the figure of a tall maiden with sharp nose and deep set face, a figure so old that all its bright paint had been replaced by a deep coating of black.

"Like what?" demanded the old man, suddenly becoming greatly excited.

"Like the figurehead."

"What figurehead? Tell me," he pleaded, "what figurehead?"

"Don't tell him. He will search out the treasure," whispered Camene.

"A figurehead I have seen," said Jeanne.

"It cannot be so." The old man suddenly

grew listless. "There was but one other. It is Spanish, very old. My father took this from a wrecked galleon when he was a boy. That other ship was wrecked so long ago. It can't be."

"Yet who can tell," he murmured to himself later, as if in a dream.

It was with a great sense of relief that Jeanne walked out of the strange cabin into the bright tropical sunlight.

"Makes me feel queer, that place," she said to Camene.

It was dark when they reached their own beach. Their first care was to drag their ancient figurehead up from the sand to a shed back of their cottage.

"I believe it is important. Perhaps a great discovery will come from it. Tomorrow we will search the reefs once more," said Jeanne.

The girl was awakened late at night by a strange sound. It appeared to come from the shed at the back of the cottage. Too sleepy and tired to think much of it, she

turned over on her pillow to resume her dreaming. Her last hazy waking thought was that she heard oarlocks creaking.

In the morning she found the fresh marks of a boat's keel on the beach. Hastening to the shed she found that the figurehead was missing.

"Gone!" Nothing could have surprised her more. "Who could have taken it? Do you suppose that old man could have suspected, and followed us?"

"No one else," said Camene. "Our figurehead stands with his at this moment. We will go see."

Jeanne had no notion of visiting that weird cabin again.

"He will have hidden it," she said. "Besides, it is not the figurehead, but the wreck from which it was torn that interests us. To-day, as never before, we will search the reefs."

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL

Next day Jeanne searched the coral reefs until her eyes were weary, but no sign of a buried wreck, where treasure might await, came to her.

A new visitor to these waters attracted her attention. A small sailing vessel with a tall mast, carrying much sail and fairly flying before the wind, appeared to be engaged in the very task that had brought them there, searching the reefs.

In vain the two girls attempted to come abreast of this stranger. Swift as a gull, light as a stormy petrel, she always eluded them. Only once did they come close enough to catch a fair view of the figure that stood in her prow. That time Jeanne thought she caught the gleam of a flowing white beard. Of this she could not be sure.

"Do you suppose that the old keeper of figureheads knows more than we do of the treasure ship?" she asked her native friend.

"It would not be strange," said Camene. "The *Espanola,* our treasure ship, has been spoken of in whispers for more than a hundred years. Who can say what he may know about her?"

It was with great joy that Jeanne found Lucien's boat drawn up on the beach when she reached the little island that night.

"Well," laughed Lucien, "we at last have a real clue to treasure, ancient buccaneers' treasure. It must be somewhere here among these very islands, so you may join us."

"Perhaps," Jeanne laughed back at him, "we may have found a clue of our own that is worth following."

"*Bon*!" exclaimed Lucien. "To-night, over a campfire on the beach, we will swap yarns, Monsieur Curlie Carson, you and I."

"And Camene," said Jeanne. "She really knows a great deal."

There was a great exchanging of confidences that night beneath the golden moon.

"It is very good," said Lucien at the end. "You young ladies may search the reefs for the *Espanola* and her treasure. Carson and I, we will search the islands for the buccaneers' treasure."

"It will be a race!" Jeanne jumped up and down in sheer joy. "A race for riches. We will see who wins!"

"A race! A race!" the others echoed. Then they all leaped to their feet to do a wild dance about the coals of the campfire.

"First, though," said Curlie, dropping once more upon the sand, "Monsieur Pier Ducas must translate our history of the buccaneers for us, or at least the part of it that has to do with the hidden treasure."

"First, too," said Lucien, "we must have another try at that monster crocodile, Old Dragon. Father grows impatient. So too do the museum people. They give us but twenty days. After that a fifteeen foot baby will take

he place of our prize. What a pity if this should happen!"

"Yes, a pity," agreed Curlie. "We will go for him tomorrow."

That night Curlie lay long upon his cot thinking of the days that had passed and those that were to come.

"Will we really get that old monster crocodile after all?" he asked himself. The chances seemed poor; yet there was joy and glory in such a victory. They could but try.

He thought of the Golden Phantom, and wondered if he would ever see it again. Thought too of the Santa Cruz, and shuddered.

He thought of the musty manuscript that had lain so long in the dungeon, and of the treasure of which it told. Would they find it? Would it be great, several hundred weight of ducats, cross money, pieces of eight doubloons? He hoped it might be, yet, scarcely dared hope. He wanted Lucien's dream to come true.

Curlie too had dreams which he wanted to come true. There was a splendid private yacht in the harbor of Belize. He dreamed of purchasing this, and of wandering from port to port and from little known bays to ancient buccaneers' coves in his own private yacht.

"Such dreams," he told himself, "are only pipe dreams, clay pipes with brittle stems."

So he fell asleep. He was awakened by Lucien, who urged him to hurry through breakfast that they might be away after Old Dragon.

Old Dragon was just as they had left him, at the bottom of the pool. To all appearances, he had not moved.

"If he can wait, so can we!" Lucien's tone was dogged in its determination.

"We will wait," said Curlie, who would have enjoyed treasure hunting better.

Three days passed. Though they watched long, the time did not come when they caught the monster off his guard.

Curlie at last took to wild turkey hunting as a diversion.

It was on one of these wild turkey hunts that something occurred which in the end might easily have cost the boy his life.

On a rough and rocky ridge where brush was thin, he caught sight of a great bronze gobbler strutting and drumming in the sun. In a moment of supreme elation, he lifted his rifle for a shot, when with the astonishing quickness of his kind, the prize bird gathered in his wings, gave three hops and vanished.

In a vain hope of seeing the turkey once more, Curlie was still wandering among the rocks when, away before him, he caught again that well remembered golden gleam of jaguar skin.

At once his heart began hammering at his ribs.

"This time," he told himself, "he shall not lead me astray, but I'll get him if I can."

He had not followed the Golden Phantom for long before being convinced of one thing;

the creature he followed was headed for the pool, at whose bottom lay the giant crocodile.

This was not strange. At these higher levels water was scarce. All manner of creatures came to drink at the pool. Curlie had seen them come and go. Little, long-eared rabbits, great brown lizards, hard-shelled armadillos, peccary pigs by the scores. All these came and went. Why not a jaguar?

Following along at a safe distance, Curlie felt more and more certain of success. The approach to the pool lay on the lower side. At the upper side he had cut a narrow opening. He would circle away through the brush and arrive at the upper opening just in time to find the jaguar lapping water from the pool, or lolling in the shade at its side.

Some twenty minutes later, with rifle cocked, breath coming quick and short, heart hammering hard, he parted the thin cover of palm leaves he had left before his opening, to steal his first stealthy look at the pool.

"He'll be there," he assured himself. "Now I have him. Now—"

Imagine his surprise, when on catching his first glimpse he saw, not a golden jaguar lapping up the cool water of the pool, but the bronze form of an Indian. Perfect shoulders, magnificent limbs, a true creature of the wild, but an Indian boy all the same.

With arms swinging high, hair tossing, the boy was executing some wild dance.

"What's the meaning of all this?" Curlie thought. "One moment a jaguar; the next a boy. Is it magic? Is—"

His reflections were cut short by the awful realization of the tragedy that was to be enacted before his very eyes.

Without a second's warning, the brown hands shot high, the bronze form executed a graceful curve, there came a splash. The Indian boy had dived into the pool.

With a cry Curlie sprang forward.

"The crocodile! The old giant. It can't be—"

The water was startling clear. Having reached the bottom, the Indian had grasped an out-cropping root with one hand, while with the other he detached a shining object from among the rocks.

He seemed about to loose his hold and float to the top, when a sudden dark shadow hid him.

"The—the beast!" breathed Curlie.

The next instant, gripping his hunting-knife in one hand, a heavy stone in the other, he plunged head foremost into the pool.

By the aid of the stone he sank swiftly. On looking up, he found himself beneath what appeared to be the brown trunk of a tree. Not in the least deceived, but calling on all his strength and prowess, he swung his heavy knife, burying it to the hilt in the brown mass above him.

He caught the gleam of jagged ivory; thrust again, fell back, was blinded by the flow of dark red that was the reptile's blood, felt the scrape of an ugly claw, was struck on

the head by a thing as hard and massive as a weaver's beam, half lost consciousness, relaxed his hold on the rock that had brought him down, swallowed a quantity of bloody water, shot upward, to at last find himself climbing up on the mossy rim of the pool.

When he came fully to himself and to the realization that he still lived, it was to find a pair of brown eyes staring at him. The eyes belonged to the Maya Indian boy who, having escaped from the great beast of the pool, and having drawn on his one strange garment, made of two small jaguar skins, sat drying himself in the sun. In his hand—Curlie later recalled this distinctly—he held some curious object that shone with the lustre of old gold.

"So this was my jaguar!" Curlie thought to himself. "Not a jaguar at all, but an Indian boy dressed in skins." Then, all at once, he felt faint and sick. "What if I had shot him!"

"Lucien!" Curlie exclaimed a half hour

later as he burst into the tent, "I have killed the old dragon of the pool!"

"What! *Bon! Bon!* Very good! You have shot him!"

"No. I killed him with my hunting-knife. He is at the bottom of the pool, quite dead. Can't see him just now; too much blood. Will be able to see him in the morning."

Lucien stared at him, at first in unbelief, then in admiration.

"*Bon!*" he exclaimed at last. "Now we shall h a v e him for our collection in the museum."

That night, long after his companion had lost himself in the land of dreams, Curlie sat swaying gently backward and forward in his hammock. He was thinking, and his thoughts were long, long thoughts.

"That Indian boy, that Golden Phantom which I thought was a jaguar, why did he attract my attention? Why did he lead me far away into the jungle? Was it that he was curious? Did he wish to study me?

Or, did he wish to make me his friend? That seems hardly probable. More likely that he wished to lead me away and away, alone in his jungle, where I would blunder hopelessly on and on until death came or he might steal upon me in my sleep and kill me."

He shuddered and tried to peer away into the darkness that hung about him like a shroud.

That Indian boy, where was he now? Was he close by their camp? Would he ever see him again?

"I saved his life," Curlie told himself. "Had I not drawn the attention of that old dragon by the thrust of my knife, he must surely have perished. Does a wild boy have a sense of gratitude? I wonder."

At last, dropping back in his hammock, he fell asleep.

The old dragon of the pool was dead. As they gazed down into those clear depths next morning, the boys saw him lying turned upon his side, motionless.

"The old cannibal! You have done for him!" whispered Lucien.

"But what is this? This was not here yesterday!" Curlie exclaimed, pointing at a strange pile of blue, green and gold that lay upon a flat rock.

"Treasure! Much ancient Maya treasure from the bottom of the pool," murmured Lucien, allowing a handful of blue and green jade and dull gold ornaments to slip through his hands. "Fifteen hundred years old, if a day. Think what they could tell of this pool!"

"How did they come there? Did you—"

"Do you think I would dive for them?" Lucien glanced toward the bottom of the pool. "No—no! Never! It was your Indian friend. He did it for you."

"For me? No, that can't be. We must leave them. He will come for them."

They did leave them. For four days, while a large boat was being brought up the river, while strong men with rope and tackle from

the yacht dragged the crocodile from the pool, while the taxidermists studied, sketched and at last skinned the great catch, the little pile of treasure lay untouched upon the rocks.

On the last day, just before their departure, Curlie gathered it all up and stowed it away in a heavy bag, and as he did so, thinking of the wild Maya boy, he murmured:

"He meant to kill me. In the beginning I am sure he did. I saved his life, and he brought this treasure from the bottom of the pool as my reward."

As his boat glided from the mouth of the river out on a moonlit bay, Lucien breathed a sigh of satisfaction. His duty to his father, to the museum and to his country was done. The monster crocodile had been killed. It had been Curlie's good fortune to strike the fatal blow. At any rate, the work was done. Now they might take up the clues left in the parchment manuscript found beneath the ancient church at Santa Cruz de Brava.

"The treasure is hidden on an island, at

the bottom of a stream. At the mouth of the river is a great tree. In the forks of this tree is cut the name of the island, Cayo del Tigre. If one can but find the tree!"

Curlie too was dreaming. He was already possessed of considerable treasure. Because of their great age, the gold and jade taken from the bottom of the pool by the Golden Phantom would, he was sure, bring a good price; just how much he could not tell.

"The Golden Phantom," he murmured. "Wonder if I will ever see that strange wild boy again?"

He was to see him again, and under the most extraordinary circumstances.

In the meantime their canoe moved silently homeward. As they came within sight of the palms that reared themselves above the cabin Lucien thought of his sister's search for the lost treasure ship, *Espanola.*

"It would be strange indeed if she should really discover the treasure buried so long that scarcely an echo of its memory comes

down to us," he said to himself. "Yet many strange things do happen on these mystery haunted shores."

"It would be jolly if she beats us," he said aloud.

"Who?" Curlie asked.

"Jeanne."

"Never fear. She won't. She's chasing the phantom of a dream."

And yet, who could be sure?

CHAPTER XIV

CAYO DEL TIGRE

Flapping his wings clumsily, a pelican arose from the mouth of the narrow stream to go skimming away. Three young crocodiles, sunning themselves on a log, dropped with faint splashes into the limpid water. Lucien sent his narrow dugout forward with slow, silent strokes.

He seemed half asleep. Drowsing in the tropical sun of mid-afternoon, he watched the waters glide by.

With a sudden start he stood straight up, gripped a handle and sent a small circular net flying through the air.

A low exclamation escaped his lips. A brilliant butterfly had passed like a flash of sunset over his head. He had made a try for it, and had missed.

"A new species, I'll be bound," he grumbled. "And he has escaped me."

Like his father, Lucien was above all else a born naturalist. All of tropical Central America fascinated him. Low lying coral beaches, murmuring palms, golden moonlight nights, glorious mornings, the brilliant plumage of birds, shimmering beauty of sea life, trembling bits of gorgeous color everywhere, who could ask for more? Lucien only wished that he might remain a long time—perhaps forever.

Of late, however, his had been a roving life. From morning until night his dugout might have been seen skimming along the shore line of some hitherto unvisited cay, or prowling about at the entrance of some sluggish stream that, emerging from an island, lost itself at once in the boundless sea.

Ah yes, nature has her charms, but this boy had other dreams. What boy, dwelling among the one time haunts of buccaneers, has not sooner or later gone on a treasure hunt?

Lucien and Curlie had been long engaged in their treasure hunt. Lucien's father had read the ancient manuscript to them with painstaking care. It had told them of the doings of the great and terrible buccaneers —Morgan, Black Beard, Bartholomew, and all the rest. At its very end were the directions for discovering treasure hidden by one of the most daring buccaneers of all time, the Frenchman, Poignard.

"Ah yes," Lucien had said to himself many times, "I have to find the mouth of that stream, the name carved long ago on that tree, carved so deep time could not erase it, and the treasure is found."

But the tree had proven his *pons assinorum.* It could not be found. Little wonder, this. Hundreds of islands dot the shores of Central America. On each island thousands of trees have grown on for a century, two, three, four centuries, only in time to fall crashing into the dense jungle, there to add their decay to the already rich soil.

All this Lucien knew well enough. But with his young blood fired by dreams of doubloons, castellanos and pieces of eight, he had pursued his search hours without end.

Not an island creek within many miles but had seen the prow of his dugout. Now, however, he had gone back to the business of catching s t r a n g e butterflies, or drawing bright colored fish from the sea, and of trapping strange and curious land animals.

"Ah!" he breathed, catching a n o t h e r glimpse of the rare butterfly. "He has alighted on that huge log. I'll get him yet."

The giant derelict of a tree on which the animated bit of color had alighted, lay half submerged at the water's edge, for this was the time of high tide. Had not some protruding snags blocked his way, Lucien might have run his dugout alongside at the spot where the butterfly had alighted. As it was, he found it necessary to back away and to approach the fallen tree from another direction.

Having reached the tree trunk and tied his dugout to a snag, he mounted, net in hand, and proceeded to walk on tiptoe over the forty feet of barkless decaying tree that lay between him and his prize.

Cautiously, step by step, he advanced. Scarcely breathing, he held his net aloft for the final stroke when, as his eyes fell at his feet, he let out a low exclamation, then at once and forever forgot the butterfly.

Little wonder, too, for there at his feet, ancient, half rotted away, yet unmistakably clear, carved in the trunk of that fallen tree was the inscription:

"Cayo del Tigre."

How the blood raced through his veins! How his heart thumped. He felt dizzy and faint. Fairly reeling, he sank down upon the log.

"Treasure!" he murmured. "Poignard's treasure!"

Then, at sound of his own voice pronouncing that name which had inspired terror to so

many hearts, he sprang to his feet. An unnameable fear gripped his heart.

Walking as steadily as his trembling limbs would permit, he made his way back to his dugout. Once there, he executed a dozen masterly strokes which sent him far out into the open bay.

There, resting upon his paddle, he surveyed the scene, studying it over and over until every tree and little bay was indelibly printed on his brain.

"Tomorrow," he said at last. "Tomorrow we shall see. Monsieur Curlie Carson and I, we will go up to that most mysterious little river where a great boulder causes a sharp bend. Then we shall see."

"Treasure!" he murmured again as he set his sail. "Poignard, the buccaneer's treasure."

Curlie Carson was at that moment seated beneath a cocoanut palm near the shore of a narrow cay. The sea, lying before the sunset, a miracle of green and gold, beckoned.

He did not respond to the call. Earlier that day he had lived for ten hours upon that sea. Far out beyond the protecting coral reefs he had sailed his frail craft. He had trolled for great fish. Even now a forty-pound tarpon and a jewfish that had come near swamping him lay in the bottom of his boat. Tomorrow Anastoscia Nicacio would take them to market for him.

"Five cent a pound," he thought. "Not so much. But here one lives for little enough. A pup tent, mosquito bar canopy, canvas cot, a fire of coals on the beach, fresh fish, cocoanuts for the taking, corn cakes baked on hot stones—who could ask for more?"

At that moment, some distance up the beach, there sounded a low, solid thump.

"Thanks, Oh god of the cocoanut palm!" he whispered. Springing to his feet, he went hopping away to the spot where a ripe cocoanut had fallen.

With his sheath knife he pried off the tough outer husk and with the small blade of his

clasp knife he bored a hole in the cocoanut's eye. He was engaged in the delectable business of gurgling the rich sweet milk from the nut, when the sudden thump of a mast dropping into a boat startled him.

It was Lucien, who had come sailing in.

"Curlie!" he shouted as his narrow dugout touched noislessly upon the coral sands. "Congratulate me! I have found the tree!"

"You haven't!" exclaimed Curlie, dropping the cocoanut in his excitement.

"It is true. I have found it; quite a dead tree; in another year or two, gone, but now solid, and there without mistake is the carved name, 'Cayo del Tigre.'"

"Island of the Tiger," Curlie repeated, still only half convinced.

"Here!" he exclaimed, "sit down here. I will bring you a nut to drink from."

"Island of the Tiger," he breathed as he hurried away. "And if it is true, Poignard's treasure! If only some one has not been before us!"

By the time he returned the sun had set. The sea was an ever darkening field of slate, while ever and anon there came rushing shoreward white lines of foam that set up such murmurs as might come from a dying world.

To the boys sitting there upon the sand the world was not dying. It was never quite so much alive. Tomorrow they were to embark upon their great adventure, the great hunt for treasure.

Long they had dreamed of this hour. Two months before, in the vault beneath the Sixteenth Century church of the abandoned city, Santa Cruz de Brava, Lucien had found the sealed bambo tubes. When broken open, these tubes had given up rolls of parchment upon which was written the history of the buccaneers of the Spanish Main, of the Mosquito Coast, and the Virgin Isles. The manuscript itself, dating back as it did to the Seventeenth Century, was a great treasure.

That was not all. This carefully preserved

history had been kept in light, water tight tubes because the writer was himself a buccaneer, and being a buccaneer, he was obliged more than once to swim for his life.

Strangest of all was the account he gave of his chief, Poignard, a French buccaneer who did not follow his outlaw calling for gain, but for revenge.

Poignard, so the story ran, had grown to young manhood in a village among the vine-clad hills of France. Having heard of the wealth to be gained in the New World, many of his kinsfolk and fellow villagers had sailed away to the Virgin Isles. Among them was LeVaune DuBon, the girl playmate and good pal of young Poignard. She had gone with her parents. He had promised to follow.

Two years passed. He sailed, but arrived too late. He found only blackened timbers where happy homes had been. Graves and scattered bones told the rest. The mercilessly cruel Spanish Dons from the mainland of Central America had attacked and razed the

little French settlement. The inhabitants had been killed or carried away captive.

That same night the British ship on which Poignard had sailed furnished food and ammunition to a British buccaneer. Poignard joined hands with the buccaneers.

His rise among the brethren of the Main was meteoric. Fearless, death defying deeds marked his career from the start. Wanting no loot, claiming no share, he attacked and pillaged the ships and towns of the Spanish Dons for revenge alone. Always, in the still of night, in the heat of battle, there floated before his eyes the vision of a fair young girl who had once been his childhood pal, and was no more.

In time he became a leader, the commander of a flotilla. Still he claimed no share in the floods of gold that flowed like water to his decks.

Reverses came. A hurricane wrecked half his ships. Others fell into the hands of the merciless Spaniards.

All this, being something of a scholar, Poignard in quiet moments had recorded in his history of the buccaneers.

At last there had come a time when with a single small ship he fled before the enemy.

Then, lest the ship and her treasure chest fall into the hands of the enemy, he had put into a cave at the mouth of an island river. Having lowered a heavy copper chest filled with gold, into a dory, he had instructed a part of his crew to sink the treasure chest in the river at a point about a mile upstream where a great boulder compels the narrow stream to swerve to the right.

"The name of that island," the record ran, "is Cayo del Tigre (Island of the Tiger). To amuse myself while my mates were gone, I carved deep into the bark of a rosewood tree the name, Cayo del Tigre.

"I have never returned to that island, and never shall," the narrator continued. "That very night we were attacked and, being outnumbered ten to one, were all captured or

killed. Having been made unconscious by a blow on the head, I was carried here by those most hated ones, and cast in a dungeon.

"From this dungeon I will never return to my only remaining love, the sea. I, Poignard, for years the terror of the Dons, am too much feared and hated for that.

"It may chance that in the years to come some Christian man may find this record and give it to the world. It may be, too, that they will search out that tree and retrieve the treasure."

There the record had ended. The fate of Poignard could only be guessed. There were bones in the dungeon. There, too, had been the tubes, sealed and unmolested until now. And what of the treasure—had it remained unmolested? That was yet to be seen.

Long they sat there, this French boy Lucien and his American companion, Curlie Carson. Again from the sea came that sweeping, ghost-like boom that, running the length of the cay, whispered of days long past and

gone, of ships that have sailed, but sail no more.

Lulled by the sound of the sea, Lucien fell into a half sleep. And into that sleep there crept through his mind dreams of ancient ships riding high in the sea, of many small boats loaded to the gunwale with buccaneers, of a boarding, wild flash of cutlasses, of shouting, battling men, then the silence of victory.

As for Curlie, he slipped away up the beach where, seated upon the pleasant veranda of a palm thatched cottage, Pier Ducas, Lucien's father, sat in the quiet of the evening meditating upon many things.

Curlie liked sitting beside this silent, scholarly man. Without speaking now, he took a seat beside him. For fully ten minutes the silence remained unbroken. Suddenly the elderly Frenchman turned to the boy.

"And tomorrow?" he said.

"Tomorrow," said Curlie, "we go treasure hunting."

"Ah! That will be quite an adventure. And the treasure? Have you found it?"

"Not quite perhaps. But Lucien thinks he knows the way."

"At any rate," smiled Pier Ducas, "one hunts treasure in safety these days. It was not always so."

"You never can tell," said Curlie.

This turn in the conversation led up to a question that had long been in his mind.

"Monsieur Ducas," he said, leaning forward eagerly, "I am told that Lucien is your only son?"

"Quite true." The French father's voice was husky. "I had two other sons. They were older. The great and terrible war came. I gave them to my country."

He stared silently into the darkness. For a time neither spoke. Then Curlie asked:

"Lucien means much to you?"

"Much." The elderly man laid a hand gently upon the boy's arm. "Much, you say? Yes, almost all. Science? Ah yes, I have

science. But what is knowledge of science without some one on whom to bestow it?

"Monsieur Carson, men live for many things, to get riches, to win power and fame. Most men live for their homes and their children. That is best of all. The humblest cottager may have a happy home and beautiful children. That is always the best that can come to any man."

"But," (it was time for Curlie's question now) "how is it that you are willing to risk the life of your boy by bringing him adventuring into the jungle, when he might be safe at school in some little French city?"

"And is the jungle dangerous?" The man's tone was low and quiet. "Yes, perhaps, a little. But in that little city at school in France, or in your America, would he be always so safe? There are parties, Monsieur. They are not always safe and quiet parties. Youth craves experience, adventure. If he cannot have true adventure he can be depended upon to sham it. Ah yes, there are

parties, sometimes quite wild. There are automobile rides after the party, not always quite safe.

"Shall I then send him to France? Well, perhaps. Who knows? I like him with me. He likes to be with me. So it should be with every father and son. He learns much here in the jungle. What he learns he will not soon forget.

"And, after all, is it so dangerous? You, Monsieur, I rely upon you to make it more safe for my boy."

"You may depend upon me to do my best," said Curlie.

"And tomorrow it is that you two go hunting treasure? Ah, that will be exciting."

Again they fell into silence. Once more Curlie caught the low murmur that ran the length of the cay, that murmur that spoke to him of wild buccaneer days that were dead and gone.

"Treasure," he whispered, "Poignard's treasure."

CHAPTER XV

THE TREASURE CHEST IS FOUND

Treasure hunting on an uninhabited jungle island off the coast of Central America should not be a dangerous occupation. And yet, on the following morning the two boys had scarcely rowed a large flat-bottomed boat past the fallen tree on whose trunk was carved the name Cayo del Tigre, before something happened that sent a tremor of fear shooting up Curlie's spine.

Over to the right a very narrow stream flowed into the river. As they were passing its mouth, he chanced to glance through the leafy canopy to the stretch of water that lay beyond. There he caught a glimpse of the rear end of a narrow pit-pan (a native dug-out) before it disappeared from view.

"Huh!" he sniffed a moment later. "Why

should that frighten me? Probably hunting crocodiles or gathering wild cocoanuts."

It did disturb him, nevertheless. Not an island in the Caribbean Sea but is haunted, so the natives say, by the ghosts of wild buccaneers who died long ago with their boots on. During nights of wild storm, black phantom ships charge across the sea. On quiet nights phantom pit-pans, driven by bony hands, ply up and down deep and shady rivers, searching for the gold that was hidden long ago.

Curlie recalled these stories, and shuddered once more. Even in the daytime, when the overhanging canopy of trees and vines cast dark shadows everywhere, this narrow, silent river was spooky enough.

Curlie's feeling of unrest was increased from time to time as they advanced by sounds that come from down the river. A splash, a low call, which indeed might have been made by a wild parrot, the snap of a dry branch, these were the disturbing sounds.

And once, just after they had fought their way past a fallen tree which quite hid the river behind them, he felt almost sure he caught the steady dip-dip of paddles in the water.

All this was little enough, amounting to nothing at all. At least, so he assured himself as with bounding heart he saw directly before them a towering boulder at a sharp bend in the stream.

"Should be here," said Lucien. Leaning over the side, he attempted to peer into the dark depths below.

"Can't see much," he complained.

"Have to use this, I guess," said Curlie. He dragged from the prow a long box affair with a glass fitted into the bottom. By thrusting the glass end into the water and looking through it, they were able to see the bottom quite clearly.

It was a difficult and uncertain search that followed. There was little enough to guide them. Had the buccaneers sunk a boat with

the treasure on board it? Was the boat still there, at least the solid ribs of her? They did not know. Had the chest been tumbled overboard? After all, who could tell but that one of the men who helped bury it had escaped the Spaniards and returned to lift it?

After three hours of careful searching, Curlie was ready to give up. Not Lucien. Lucien was still staring down into that moss covered bottom. The boat was moving slowly downstream when Curlie, who sat dreaming in the prow, was suddenly startled from his dreams by a sound. Quick as a flash, his eyes sought the spot. Instantly his heart skipped a beat.

"Who can be watching us in the heart of a jungle island?" he whispered to himself.

He knew no answer. Yet he was sure he had seen a face, a dark, evil face that had disappeared like a flash. It was mysterious, disturbing in the extreme. It—

"There!" exclaimed Lucien. "Right there! Stop! Stop! I saw something.

"There . . . There now," as Curlie backed the boat. "A little to the right . . . There, there it is."

He was overboard in a twinkle. For ten seconds he stood erect in the water up to his armpits. Then, like a flash, his feet shot from under him and he went splashing out of sight.

Curlie gasped. What had happened? Had the boy stood upon the back of a crocodile? He was seized with consternation.

This lasted but a fraction of a moment. Bubbling and blowing, Lucien came to the top.

"Slipp—slipped off the thing. Slip—slippery," he sputtered. "Square like. Real thing, I'll be bound. Give me a hand."

Lucien's plunge had roiled the water. It was some time before they could see the bottom clearly.

"There! There it is!" Lucien cried at last "Right beneath. And see! There where my feet scraped off the mud! It's metal. Cop-

per! A copper chest! Hurrah! Hurrah! We have found it."

"Not so loud," warned Curlie.

"But here there is no one," remonstrated Lucien.

"You can never tell." There was a deal of deep meaning in Curlie's tone.

As the French boy's startled gaze swept the narrow enclosure and the water beyond, his face took on an unusual pallor.

"What is it?" he whispered. "What do you know?"

"Nothing for sure," said Curlie. "Only it is best to be quiet. We are only two boys, and we are alone in the midst of a jungle island. Should anything happen to us, no one would ever know."

Lucien was not mistaken. At the bottom of the river pool was a solid copper chest—a tremendously heavy one, at that. Who could tell what wealth it might contain, what doubloons, what guineas, what gold plate and jewels?

The chest that had been lowered was at a point very close to the main sweep of the current, but not quite in it. Resting on a rocky bed, it must, at the height of the rainy season, have been swept clean of soil and debris. After that, on the upper side at least, it must have been polished until it gave off a dull red glow.

At present, with the rainy season all but at an end and the stream flowing sluggishly within its banks, it stood there like a great copper boulder. In truth, only its regular form distinguished it from an ordinary rock.

When, with a flat mahogany slab, the boys scraped the silt away, it stood out in startling relief, the perfect product of some ancient, highly skilled coppersmith.

"Four feet under water. Going to be hard to get a rope around it," said Curlie. "We can pry it up at the end, I guess."

A stout pole was cut. This they thrust into the water. With the heavy end against the chest, they shoved a small boulder beneath

it, then set their weight sagging on the pole. The pole slipped on the smooth copper surface. They went plunging head foremost, to come up sputtering.

"Pity some of those old buccaneers couldn't drop around and give us a hand," grumbled Curlie. "Anyway, they might have left directions for raising the clumsy thing. Wonder how this Captain Poignard meant to go about it?"

"No one knows. It don't tell in my parchment. His men would have managed it. If the Dons hadn't got them they'd been after it in three days. They didn't hide treasure much, and when they did they came after it pretty quickly."

"Let's try it again. Take a shorter pole."

Again they sagged down upon the pole. To their great joy the point held. The chest, which had broken the waters there for many a decade, rose slowly upward.

"There, now. Can you hold it?" Curlie whispered, as if afraid some one might hear.

While Lucein rested his weight on the pole, Curlie thrust a rope beneath the chest and three times round it. Having drawn the rope tight and tied it, he whispered, "There. That should hold. Ease away. Now we have only to attach a double pulley block to the bread-nut tree over yonder, draw a rope through it, hook the second block to the rope around the chest and then heave, ho, up she comes! Once on the shore, we can tumble it on board somehow."

"*Bon!*" exclaimed the French boy, highly elated at the progress they were making. "We are efficient, Monsieur Carson. Very. We shall soon be as good buccaneers as old Black Beard himself.

"There was a buccaneer for you!" he said with a grimance. "Believed in keeping in practice, he did, or so my parchment tells me. A most astonishing fellow. Once when in a calm at sea with nothing to do, he drove all his crew into the hold and battered down the hatches. After that he set some bars of

brimstone burning. His men stood it as long as they could, then broke for the deck. He was proud of the fact that he stayed down longer than the rest. Said sometime he'd see which of them could stand the most hanging by the neck from the yardarm."

"Do you suppose he ever tried it?" Curlie shuddered.

"It doesn't say. It does say that once when he was in his cabin with his sailing master and a pilot at night he blew out the light and, just as a matter of keeping in practice, fired point-blank at the other two. He missed one, but crippled the other for life by a ball in his knee."

"I think," said Curlie, as he waded ashore with a rope, "that I'd rather pull my own ropes than to have such a fellow come to life and give us a hand. He might have some sort of a notion that it was still necessary for him to keep in practice." He started to laugh, but stopped suddenly to stare. Had he caught the glimpse of something back in the brush?

"Give me a hand!" he exclaimed. "Let's get on."

"They weren't all like that," said Lucien, gripping the rope. "Some were real gentlemen. Take the very name, buccaneer. What does it mean?"

"What?"

"Meat dryer. Came from drying the meat of wild cattle found on some of the islands."

"Then," laughed Curlie, "our Mr. Armour is a buccaneer?"

"Quite," smiled the French boy.

By this time the block and tackle was set. Finding solid, dry footing on shore, they began to heave away.

"Heave! Ho!" shouted Curlie. "Heave! Ho!"

It was no easy task, dragging that ponderous chest over the uneven river bed. But, little by little, they won their way until at last, after seeing it turn twice over on the bank, they dropped perspiring beside it.

"Now into the boat you go," said Curlie,

once he had caught his breath, "and away we sail."

He gave himself time to examine the chest in a hurried way and to speculate for a moment upon the nature and value of its contents. To examine its contents now was out of the question. It was solidly locked, and no doubt corroded tight in the bargain.

"Doubloons, pieces of eight," he murmured. "Perhaps silver and gold plate and jewels. Who can tell?"

One thing puzzled him. As the chest turned over there had come no sound of metal thumping upon its metal sides.

"Filled with mud," he told himself. "Packed tight. Nothing can move."

In this, as it turned out later, he was more nearly right than he knew.

To cut some flat skids, to rope their boat solidly to the shore, then to drag the ponderous affair aboard was a considerable task. The shades of night were falling before they completed the task.

"Look!" exclaimed Lucien, sweeping the top of the chest with his hand. "This *is* the buccaneer's chest, and no mistake. Here's their coat of arms."

There, sure enough, carved in bold relief and in some way riveted to the top of the chest, was as perfect a likeness of skull and crossbones as one might care to see.

"Done by a real artist, too," said Curlie with an admiring gaze.

"Real artists there were among the Brethren of the Main," said Lucien. "Artists and poets as well, a member of the English nobility and a banker who had grown tired of banking, students, and all that. It tells about it in my parchment. But let's get on."

"Going to be spooky, coming down that black old river in the night," murmured Curlie as, casting loose the painter, he seized a paddle to bring the boat swinging about into midstream.

It was strange, this drifting down in the gathering darkness. Here and there they

came upon a broad clear space where the silent dip of paddle hurried the boat on its way. For the most part, dodging low to escape an overhanging branch, swinging about to avoid a sunken log, they moved with the sluggish current.

The heavy copper chest had rested at the bottom of the stream through many long years. How different had been those other days! How strange the contents of the chest must be!

A small cloud, very high in the heavens, caught the last red glow of the sun and, with a suddenness that was startling, cast it down upon the deep, dark river pool upon which, at that moment, their boat rested.

With a sharp exclamation, Lucien sprang back from the chest. His heel caught, and he barely escaped a downward plunge.

"Now what!" exclaimed Curlie.

"Foolish enough," said the French boy, rapidly regaining his composure. "When that light struck across that old copper skull it

made it seem alive. It was ghostly; fairly seemed to stare at me from its black old sockets."

"Well, stow away your nerves. There's a long pull ahead of us. We can't afford to have the boat capsized. Going to be dark, too."

Even as he spoke, the light from the cloud blinked out, and night, sudden, ominous, moonless night, settled upon them.

Curlie found himself feeling creepy. Every sound from near and far made him start and shudder. What was it? The vision of buccaneers, those bloody men of other days? Was it the thought of the lives lost, good ships scuttled, quiet villages pillaged that gold might flow like water on the buccaneer's decks? Was it the memory of that face he had glimpsed back there in the brush? Who could say?

"Be glad when we see the lights of the cay," he said to himself.

Ah yes, so he would. Very glad indeed.

So, hoping, dreaming, their spirits afire with wild visions of youth, the two boys floated on into the night.

Stars came out. They caught fleeting glimpses of them through the green canopy above. As yet there was no moon. The island jungle was strangely silent. Here a bird, disturbed in its sleep, chirped complaint; there a young crocodile dropped into the water with an all but inaudible splash, then all was silence again.

"Guess I made a mistake," Curlie thought to himself as they neared the mouth of the stream. "Wasn't anyone about who would disturb us. Make the bay all right. Be in the cay soon enough. And then—" He caught his breath at thought of prying the chest open.

It was dark at the mouth of the stream, very dark indeed. He was leaning forward, peering into that darkness, trying to make out the channel to avoid sandbars, when off to the left he thought he caught a sound. The

sound, like the heavy breathing of a swimmer, fairly set his teeth clattering.

"Got to get out of here," he thought. "Got to do it quick!"

He lifted his arm for a quick stroke of the paddle when of a sudden, out of the darkness at his back there loomed the black bulk of a man. Another and yet another.

CHAPTER XVI

PRISONERS

A torch, until then mysteriously concealed, flashed out. Before Curlie was a horrible visage of a man, a man very much like a buccaneer. With a knife in his teeth he was reaching out a hand to seize the boy. From behind there came a stifled cry.

"Lucien! They got him!" thought Curlie, benumbed by surprise and fear.

Before he could move he was flat on his back with a knife at his throat.

"This is the end," he thought.

It was not. Instead of wielding the knife, the buccaneer drew forth a stout leather thong and bound him hand and foot.

Then, without a word, he seized a paddle. His two companions did the same. With a smooth, gliding motion, the boat moved for-

ward. They were away, but bound for what port?

At that moment the moon came out from behind the shore line, painting a path of gold across the sea. To Curlie, who by twisting his neck could catch a full view of it all, that path seemed the way to another world.

As for Lucien, who had been bound and tossed down in the stern, he too had seen the face. It had brought back to him forcibly a previous experience, his hours spent in the dungeon beneath the ancient church at Santa Cruz de Brava.

"It is the same face," he told himself. "The very one that appeared at the entrance to the dungeon that night.

"That time too," he thought with a start, "there were three. Can it be that they have followed us all this time, that they were hiding in the brush behind the beach on the cay as we planned for this day's venture? Who can know? And who can say what is to be next?"

He began silently working at his bonds. To his great joy he found the one that held his hands was a little loose.

"Might get it off in time," he thought, "and then—" With a little sigh of hope, he began the task in earnest.

Curlie's hands and feet were fastened tight enough. No chance of escape for him. After a brief period of fruitless struggle, he gave himself over to the business of watching the boat move down the golden path of the moon.

"Making for the mainland," he told himself, "probably some dark old river after that." He shuddered at thought of what might follow. Their captors were not Indians. "Mexicans or Spaniards, desperadoes of some sort," he told himself. "More than probable that they are Mexican prisoners who escaped some time back from the old Spanish church when it was used as a prison. Got some sort of a camp at the head of a river in the depths of the jungle."

Strangely enough, with nothing else to do,

overcome by the drowsiness that comes from long hours of labor under a tropical sun, he fell asleep.

When he awoke all was dark about him. Only now and again did he catch glimpses of light from above.

"Passing up some stream beneath overhanging trees," was his mental comment.

The thing that awakened him was a hand on his wrist.

"What now?" His heart skipped a beat. "Going to unbind me? What then?"

Pictures of ancient outlaw days passed before his mind's eye. Men walked the plank, were thrown to the crocodiles, were hacked in pieces, burned at the stake.

He need not have tortured his brain; not for the moment at least. His feet remained bound. Into his hands a paddle was thrust. He was told in Spanish with a terrible oath that he was to paddle.

Paddle he did. With shoulder heaving and ankles aching from their tight binding, with

perspiration pouring down his face, he toiled on into the night until there broke upon his wearied senses the sound of distant thunder.

"Waterfalls," he told himself, "and soon a portage."

"A portage with this heavy boat and that tremendous weight of copper, silver and gold. It can't be done."

That his captors were of the same mind was soon enough to become evident.

"But Lucien?" he thought suddenly. "What of him? Where can he be? Why have they not set him paddling too?"

For the moment the foliage above them was so dense, the darkness so complete that he could scarcely see the man who paddled directly behind him. In a moment, as they came into an open space, the moonlight fell upon the full length of the boat.

One glance back, and he gasped. The boat was the same—the evil straining faces of the outlaws, the dull red of the copper chest were there; but Lucien was gone.

"Gone!" he whispered. His head was in a whirl. How had he gone? Had he broken his bonds and escaped unseen in the darkness, or had he, choosing death by drowning rather than that which lay before, plunged silently into the sea or the black old river, bonds and all? He shuddered. No answer came to his troubled heart.

A moment later the boat swung beneath some red mangrove branches, was brought solidly against the low bank and tied there.

Curlie's hands were again tied. He was carried ashore and dropped roughly upon a bed of moss.

For some time he lay there listening to the grunts and low exclamations of the men as they attempted to land the heavy chest.

At last the thing was accomplished. Then, on pairs of poles, they succeded in rolling it to a narrow clearing. At the center of the clearing was an ancient palm thatched cabin.

The scenes which followed one another in quick succession will always remain in Cur-

lie's memory as one wild, mad, unreal dream.

The three men entered the cabin. There, out of the boys' sight and doubtless quite unconscious of his presence, they began to eat and drink, and after that to smoke. Was it what they drank; did they smoke some drugging leaf? Curlie will never know. Whatever it may have been, it drove reason from its throne and set seven devils there.

From inside the cabin there came wild shouts and peals of mad laughter.

At last the men came trooping out. Curlie saw them clearly by the light of a fire they had kindled outside the cabin. The first brandished a great two bladed knife, the second a heavy revolver. The third brought up the rear with a great sapodillo club.

"It's my finish," thought Curlie, shrinking far back into the bush. "They'll make an end of me now."

They took not a look his way, but, marching up to the copper chest, attacked it as if it were a hog to be cut up or a wild beast to

be slain. The man with the great knife hacked at it, the second stood away to take careful aim at the lock and empty his revolver chambers against it. The man with the club beat the lock with all his might. All their mad efforts brought them nothing. The ancient lock held on with a grip of death. Had all the buccaneers that sailed the Spanish Main been seated upon the lid, it could not have been held down more firmly.

The man with the knife made a second sally. Thrusting the point of the blade between the chest and its lid, he attempted to pry the lid up. He gave a mighty heave. Something snapped. It was his blade. It had broken square off. With the cry of an angry beast, he threw the heavy knife high in air. It came down blade first within ten feet of the spot where Curlie lay; might have pierced his heart, for all they knew or cared.

This tragic bit of comedy was nearing its end. The poisonous drug which had so stirred their fancy and maddened their brains

was having its second round. It was making them stupid and dull. They stumbled about from place to place. They approached the chest to sit down upon it and debate in maudlin whispers.

It was at this time that Curlie caught the sound of a half inaudible sigh that, moving from tree to tree, passed over the crest of the forest. He caught a glimpse of something jet black and ominous rising slowly above the trees to the left of the clearing.

The three outlaws rose and, clinging to one another, passed into the cabin. That was the last Curlie ever heard of them. Did they drop in a heap, to fall into a drugged stupor that was not sleep? Did they crawl like lizards on the floor until the drug claimed them for its own? Who could tell?

In the meantime, the murmur in the treetops became a shout. Great boughs tossed and twisted. Off to the left an ominous rolling sphere of black rose higher and higher. There came a sudden flash, a roll of thunder.

The sky turned a livid green. Flash followed flash. Crashes were deafening.

Then, as if to prove that black was not truly black, a cloud darker and more menacing than the first seemed to rise, a solid mass of water drawn directly from the sea.

A great gust of wind sweeping across the clearing caught the fire and, tossing it high, sent it whirling to the four corners of the jungle. The boy's brain was in a whirl. His senses reeled. How was this all to end? Something stirred over to the left. Looking there, he caught a gleam of old gold.

"The Golden Phantom!" He could not believe his senses.

Yet it was true. The strange Indian boy approached swiftly. In his hand was a long, gleaming knife. Curlie was ready for anything. "Death or deliverance?" he though

With two deft strokes, the boy severe bonds, then vanished like a flash.

"Reward," thought Curlie. "I s life. He saves mine i rn."

Yes, his life had been spared; but for how long?

Rising, he stood up stiffly, to stare about him. Then it was that he became conscious of a sound, an all pervading, awe inspiring sound that came from nowhere, yet seemed everywhere. "Like God walking on the wind," he thought.

Instinctively he seized a flaming brand and raced for the river. By the light of the brand he fought his way up a steep bank where, facing the river was a high cliff with a shelving rock at the bottom, not unlike a cave.

Creeping in beneath the cliff, he sat down with his back to the wall, to wait—to wait for what? He could not tell.

"'God walking on the wind,'" he whispered again.

Hearing a sound off to his left, he looked [illegible]e to see a great striped jaguar crouching [illegible] the rock.

[illegible]range. He looked at the great [illegible]ot afr[illegible]d. The cat looked at

him, and did not move. Together they were afraid, afraid of that other thing.

And then with a mad rush it came, a crashing, rushing, thundering, terrible thing. The air was filled with strange weird noises; it was writhing with black objects. They sped past the cliff. They splashed into the stream and filled it. They came crashing down upon the roof of the cavern, sending tons of rocks catipulting over.

Yet all the time the boy and the jaguar cowering in the corner were safe.

The great hubub, the crashing, snapping, and the whirling, the racing of winds and mad thunder of storm was all over before the boy had found time to despair.

Then came the rain. Such cataracts, such deluge the boy had never beheld, and never will again. It was as if a downspout of the sky, a mile in circumference, had suddenly made connection with water vats above that were broad and deep as the sea. In a moment's time the river became a torrent. Mad

rushing black water creeping high, swept past his cavern.

"It will rise higher. I shall be carried away," he thought. What the result might be he did not so much wonder. His mind, benumbed by the terrific immensity of it all, had all but ceased to function.

Suddenly the downpour ceased. Clouds vanished. The moon came out. A bright and vivid moonlight flooded all. The great cat slunk away, but Curlie remained to wonder—and marvel.

Before him, through the jungle far as eye could see, a path like the path of a reaper in the meadow had been cut through the forest. Trees a hundred, two, three, five hundred, perhaps a thousand years old lay flat to the earth.

Curlie shuddered. It was not a wide path, but wide enough.

"What if I had remained where I was?" he thought. "Would I have been alive? Not a chance."

Again his mind worked, but his lips expressed no part of that which went on within. He was thinking of that frail bamboo shack, and of the three men who lay in the direct path of the hurricane.

"Not a chance," he whispered and, bad as the men undoubtedly were, he felt sorry for them.

"The drug," he murmured. "What a death! Had it not been for the drug they might have been saved."

At once his mind was at work. Lucien? What of him? Who could know? He could only wait time's unfolding; but those three men were not far away. The effect of the drug would wear away. They might not all be dead, might at this moment be pinioned to earth, writhing in pain.

"Have to try to find a way back," Curlie muttered.

It would be a hard task. Great trees, brush, vines, palms, thorns had been thrown to earth in wildest confusion.

CHAPTER XVII

RIDING THE FLOOD

As he arose to try beating his way back, Curlie was greeted by a faint streak of gray light in the east.

"Dawn is here," he thought. "Dawn upon a wrecked jungle." Strangely enough, he thought of a story told him in his childhood, the story of the great flood and of Noah's ark floating at its crest. He had often wondered how their first dawn looked to them. Now he felt that he knew.

Water lay all about him. Only by climbing along the fallen tree trunks could he make his way back to the spot that had once been a small clearing.

When, after a half hour of battling with water, thorns and brush, he came within sight of the spot, he found it hard to recognize.

A bunch of brown palm leaves torn from the thatched roof marked the place where the shack had been.

He knew that his eyes did not deceive him. All about the narrow circle that had once been clearing, standing erect like sentries, were broken and splintered tree trunks. At the very center of the one time clearing was a gigantic mass of broken and twisted trees. Beneath all this was the bamboo shack and the three men. Swirling and eddying about the wreckage was the flood of gray and muddy water.

"Judgment," Curlie thought. He had once heard a preacher speak of God's stern judgment. This, he thought, must be it. Who could say what crimes these men had committed here beneath "God's first temples?" The temples had come crashing down upon them. Great floods had closed the scene.

Sick and faint at thought of it all, Curlie turned away. Then, of a sudden, his eyes were caught by a dull red gleam.

"The chest," he told himself.

It was true. The great copper chest, lying as it did upon higher land, had been submerged, but now as the waters abated was just showing above the flood. It lay there now, reflecting the bright light of the sun.

But now, as his gaze swept the scene of devastation, a more welcome object caught his eye.

"The boat!" His eyes gleamed at sight of it.

"Hadn't counted upon such luck."

Plunging into the murky waters, he swam to the point where the boat, caught in a tangle of tree tops, in apparent impatience to be away, bobbed up and down in the rushing tide.

"Don't worry, old boat, I won't keep you waiting long."

Seizing the paddle, the boy backed away into open water, then with a shudder at thought of what lay beneath that tangled mass of trees, and a longing glance bestowed

upon the copper chest, he deftly swung his boat about and headed downstream.

It was a very much surprised Lucien who late that afternoon saw Curlie come sailing back to the cay.

They were not long in swapping stories. In the boat with the buccaneers Lucien had managed to free first his hands, then his feet. On arriving at a dark spot close to the mouth of the river, he had slipped silently overboard.

With only one thought—that of making his way back to the cay, of securing reinforcements and coming to the aid of his companion—he had followed along the bank of the river until he came to a bamboo hut. In the hut he had found a lone black woman, very old and very deaf.

From her he had secured a dilapidated dugout. In this unsafe craft he had made his way to the cay. He had not been there a quarter of an hour when the storm broke in wild fury.

The hurricane had not passed directly over

the cay, so the inhabitants had been safe enough. But there had been such a tremendous disturbance of the sea as sent tidal wave after tidal wave across the beaches, carrying away half the docks and every boat on the beach.

"You see," said Lucien, "we have been marooned here. We longed to come to your aid, but could not."

Some hours later the two boys sat on the beach watching the last golden gleam of a glorious tropical sunset. They were thinking. Through Lucien's mind there passed a picture of a beautiful old chateau with a green meadow before it. At its back was a garden where scraggly pear trees stood like hiding robbers against the wall. Back of the garden was pasture land, and back of that, hanging on the hillside, was a dark forest.

"Some time," he said, as much to himself as to his companion, "we will go after the chest. It will always be there. Into that wilderness no one goes. There three men

were accustomed to go, but those three are dead."

"Dead," replied Curlie with a tremor shaking his narrow shoulders. Then, very slowly, "Yes, dead. Yes, sometime we will go back. But not tomorrow."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BLACK BOX

Curlie Carson sat dreaming before a small tent. Back of the tent were the great spreading leaves of a cohune nut palm, and back of that the jungle. Before him, sweeping ever onward, was the broad green river.

Curlie had been up this river before. Farther up the river, unless some one had happened upon it, was the buccaneer's chest.

The torrent was gone now. The river, moving along sluggish and slow, seemed to beckon.

"No," he said, half aloud, "I can't come. No boat."

It was true. He had no boat. Before him was the river. Back of him and all about was impenetrable jungle. It was many miles to the ocean, and he had no boat. Two days before

he and Lucien, with Lucien's father, Pier Ducas, had ascended the river. They had camped here. That night their dugout had disappeared. There was no trace of it. Prints of bare feet in the mud had told the story.

"Indians," Professor Ducas had said at once.

Neither Curlie nor Lucien, his boy companion, had doubted it. They were convinced at once that they had come quite by accident upon a band of those mysterious pygmy-like brown people, the Maya Indians.

These Indians were all about them now. Curlie was convinced of that. Only once or twice had they caught a glimpse of a clean brown heel, but they were surrounded, cut off, all the same. Strange sounds and signs, a broken vine, a machete cut upon a tree, wild cries at night, the distant gleam of a campfire, scattered ashes in the brush, a double-headed snake skin drum which Curlie had found and brought in — these were signs enough.

"Wouldn't be a bit of use making a raft or a crude dugout," Curlie told himself. "They'd destroy it or take it from us, these Santa Cruz Indians. The Santa Cruz!" He trembled as he said the words. That symbol, which had been taken over by these savage people as an idol, had once come near costing him his life. He had seen it, all illumined by a weird green light at night. He hoped that he might not see it again.

Were these mysterious people who surrounded them now the same Indians who had dragged him before the idol, there to be condemned to die a terrible death? And would they in their own good time carry him and his companions, Professor Pier Ducas and his son Lucien, to that fatal spot, there to be tried by a savage court?

He shuddered at the thought and wished his companions close at hand.

Professor Ducas had treated the matter lightly. "In good time," he had said, "our boat will be returned and we may continue

our journey up the river in search of this buccaneer treasure chest which you boys were so unfortunate as to have taken from you before you had an opportunity to examine its contents.

"In the meantime," he had continued, "there is treasure all about us. The jungle is rich in treasure. On the earth there grow mosses and ferns which no man has yet discovered. In the streams and among the bushes are all manner of unusual living creatures, while here and there the most wonderful birds and butterflies flit about."

"I do believe that they have quite forgotten that we are virtually prisoners," Curlie told himself as he thought of that unusual father and son creeping about somewhere in the jungle, ever eagerly searching for the unusual and the unknown.

"Fact is," he grumbled, "I would be inclined to doubt it myself if it were not for unmistakable signs. That drum, for instance." He poked the snake skin head with his toe,

and at once the thing gave off a resonant boom.

"Some drum." The thing had not seemed worth considering before. "Might get a lot of noise and maybe some real music out of it."

In his time Curlie had been something of a trap drummer. With time hanging idly on his hands, he decided to fashion a pair of drumsticks and to surprise his friends that night.

He had not completed this task when a fresh notion struck him all of a heap.

"Get a big kick out of that," he told himself with a chuckle.

After dragging the drum, which was a hollow cylinder of wood with a square of dried boaconstrictor skin drawn tightly over each end, into his tent, he searched in his kit bag until he brought forth a small coil of insulated wire and a strange brown affair about the size of a man's hand. After extending the wire across the floor of the tent he attached it to

the brass post on a black box that stood in a corner.

"Knew I'd need you," he murmured. "My old black box."

Having settled the box firmly in its place, he covered the wire with moss.

He next partly removed one head of the drum, thrust the strange brown affair inside, attached the loose end of the wire to it, replaced the snake skin head, then rolled the drum outside again. After carefully covering the remaining section of wire, he once more resumed his imitation of a meditative Buddha.

"Get a great kick out of that," he told himself once more after a half hour of meditation.

He was right. The Indian drum affair was destined to start something. Just how much he was not permitted to know.

It is often so. Little things started as simple amusement often lead to great affairs, even to turning points in our lives.

After sitting there for some time, becoming dissatisfied with the present arrangement of things, he dragged the mysterious black box from its place in the corner. After placing it behind the tent flap, he coiled up a loose portion of the wire, then buried it all in soft moss.

"Have you close by," he said, casting a fleeting glance toward the edge of the jungle.

Having caught no sign of the hunters, he sat down once more to wonder and to dream.

"How is it all to end?" he asked himself. "One never gets into the jungle but he comes upon wild Mayas. Is my friend the Golden Phantom a member of the band who stole our boat? Doesn't seem probable. Yet these are strange people.

"The chest? Is it still there? No living person, save the three of us, knows of its whereabouts. But yes, one other. The Golden Phantom." The thought came to him as a shock. If this strange, wild boy knew

the value of gold, he might have called his people to the spot where the chest rested.

"Then we'd find an empty shell," he told himself. "Who can know? Why are they hindering us?"

He thought of the golden-haired Jeanne and her search for ancient treasure.

"She's chasing an illusion," he told himself. "But let her dream on. With her father away, she'll have time enough to skim the surface of the sea with that dark eyed native girl friend of hers."

He was right. Jeanne did have an abundance of time on her hands. She was employing it well, and with great results.

Once more Curlie's mind turned to their dilemma and to the missing boat.

"There must be a way out," he told himself. "There always is. Just what that way might be, I can't see now."

Scarcely had he concluded his reflection when, from around a spreading breadnut tree Lucien and his father appeared.

The man carried on his back the carcass of a great golden cat. From the boy's shoulder hung a bronze gobbler.

"Hurrah!" shouted Curlie. "To-night at least we shall have a feast."

"Splendid luck to-day," smiled Lucien. "A turkey, a jaguar and three new kinds of butterflies."

"You'd think," said Curlie, "that we came up here to hunt butterflies."

"Why not," said the genial Frenchman. "When one is a naturalist he may always work. Were one in a dungeon I dare say he might find bats, rats, lizards and insects enough to keep his brain busy for a year."

While Lucien and his father were preparing the turkey and roasting it to a turn over a fire of coals, Curlie worked with pegs and rawhide strings. He was shaping up his drum for the night's business.

"That," he said to Lucien at last, "is some drum!" He tapped it lightly with his improvised stick. "You couldn't get better

music out of any drum. Going to give a little entertainment to-night to—to the moon and the jungle, and to any of our little brown friends who happen to be lurking about.

"Tell you what!" he exclaimed with a burst of enthusiasm. "I'll make them feel like pikers in the musical game. Do it with their own musical instrument, too."

A strange and weird setting awaited Curlie's musical entertainment that night. The moon hanging directly overhead tinted the dark green of the clearing with a touch of gold. At the edge of the clearing it painted shadows so black that no eye could penetrate the mystery haunted jungle beyond.

The fire which had died down to a few coals, as if seeking in vain to light the great beyond, now and again sent rocket-like sparks flying high and wide. Each spark, like some little bird flying over a pathless sea, vanished before it had reached its goal. Darkness more intense than before surrounded the clearing.

Of a sudden, as Lucien and his father sat conversing in low tones of flowers and birds, strange reptiles and butterflies, there came a low rumble that brought the naturalist up short in the midst of a sentence.

"It is but Monsieur Curlie Carson and his drum," said Lucien.

"Ah well, then. We shall have a concert."

Such a concert as they did have! Those tropical jungles, those mahogany trees, those waving palms, those fallen monarchs of the forest had never reverberated to stranger or more hilarious music.

Came a roll of thunder, then a slow terump-terump-terump l i k e the march of many soldiers. This was followed by a beat so muffled and slow, so mournful and sad that one might have guessed that all the good spirits in the world were dead.

A drove of little wild pigs, feeding in the forest, caught the first note, lifted their heads, sniffed the air, s t o o d motionless, caught the wild throb, let out low protesting

grunts, then went racing madly away through the jungle.

Now, with a sudden roar, the drum shook all the heavens. It seemed that the towering trees might be shaken from their places and the moon come tumbling down. But still the tree-tops waved gently and the moon tinged the green with a touch of gold.

A little wild deer, sleeping in the brush close to the clearing, sprang suddenly to his feet. Then, as if led by an invisible cord, he walked to the edge of the clearing. There, with head held high, he listened to the rolling reverberations that were now like thunder and now like the low beat of the surf upon the sand.

With a start and a backward leap, the deer was away. An enemy, his most feared enemy, an Indian, had appeared within ten feet of him at the place where palms and vines grew.

The Indian was not alone. Here was one, there another, here a third and a fourth, ten,

twenty. Who could tell how many more? The white man and the two boys were surrounded by them.

Nor was Curlie entirely unconscious of his audience. Here a half naked brown form, bending forward to catch a low note of some fresh outburst, came out clear in the moonlight. Now a palm leaf bending low, revealed a stooping figure. And now one man, two, three stepped boldly out into the bright moonlight.

Seeing this, as if weary of playing, Curlie dropped his drumsticks to lean back against the tent pole. At the same time his right hand stole back behind the tent flap to the black box. The side of the box swung away like a door. The door was made in two sections, one within the other. The inner sections turned half about. The boy's nimble figure touched a knob, another and yet another. Then, as his hand drew back out of the tent, he sat still. There was an air of expectancy in his poise.

His hands still hung motionless at his side when from out the drum there came a sound. The sound, weird, indistinct, yet the unmistakable sound of a human voice singing, was caught by the breeze and wafted out over the clearing.

Startled, an Indian's keen ear caught it. Another and another. Without seeming to will it, little brown men crept from their hiding.

"Got their idols who talk, have they?" Curlie grumbled to himself. "Well, I've got a drum that can sing."

Once more his hand, stealing backward, touched a knob on the black box. With a sudden burst of sound the singing voice rose loud and clear, far above the treetops.

"There is something for you!" Curlie's voice was tense with excitement. He had started something, a thing that to the Indians was strange and unreal. How far dared he go? What would a drum, singing in a language quite unknown to them, mean? What

fear, what hate, what unnamed passion might it stir up within them?

With trembling fingers he reached for the knob. But he did not touch it.

"Not yet." His hand fell back. "Let's see."

And still the Indians crowded closer.

The effect of the weird song that came from within the snake's head Indian drum was surprising. Lucien smiled. His father's brow contracted into a frown. As if charmed by the sight of a ghost, the Indians stood leaning forward at rigid attention. Now one came a step forward.

As for Curlie, he sat with his head against the tent pole, looking, listening. With every sense alert, he appeared to await some startling development.

Still the song ran on. A moment passed, two, three, four. Somewhere back in the jungle a parrot screamed. Faint and from far away there came the puh-puh-puh of the most feared beast of the jungle, a jaguar.

Then, save for the singing of the drum, all was silence.

Of a sudden the singing ceased. Startled by the silence, the Indians leaped back into the jungle. As a mother receives a frightened child to her breast, the jungle closed in upon them.

The moon, hanging large and golden above the clearing, painted the green with a touch of old gold. Dark shadows loomed on every side. For a moment all was still. Then there came a dull rumble. Curlie had continued his drum serenade.

Tom, tom, tom, terump, terump, tum, tum. It sent echoes far out through the forest. It swelled, grew louder, seemed to fairly shout defiance to the little brown men who might now be seen peering out from behind the broad palm leaves.

Then, with a sudden burst of sound, it ceased.

At once, as if taking up the refrain, in a high soprano, the drum again began to sing.

Once more, as if drawn by an invisible thread of great strength, the Indians advanced closer and closer. Now they were fifty yards from the tent, now forty, now thirty, now ten.

With a frown of uncertainty on his face, Curlie put back a hand. Instantly there came from the drum such a piercing scream that even the treetops appeared to pause in their swaying to listen.

Once, twice, and yet again it arose, shrill and light; then silence, a most terrible silence, hung deep and ominous over the jungle.

From the drum there came no other sound, but from the jungle there sounded a faint humming like that made by a hive of wild bees. This increased in strength and intensity. Ten seconds passed. The sound was like the distant murmur of waterfalls; a half minute and it seemed that all the jungle was filled with sound. Then, sudden, piercing, high, a terrible chant rent the air.

"The devil dance!" whispered Lucien.

"Or some mad war dance." Curlie's hair stiffened at the back of his neck. With a back hand movement he shoved the black box far into the shadows. It is more than possible that, at this moment, he wished that that particular instrument were in the shop from which he had bought it.

Moments passed. The chant died away. Once more the grave-like hush of the jungle hung over all. What was to come next? Were they to be attacked? If they were, what chance had they? None.

But no attack came. A half hour passed. The entire jungle seemed asleep.

Rousing himself, Curlie seized a mahogany pole and began poking the fire vigorously. As it flared up, then slowly died away, his thoughts turned to another channel. In his mind's eye he saw a sweeping flood and in the midst of that flood the shining top of an ancient copper chest.

"Gold," he murmured. "Full of gold. I wonder if we will ever see the inside of it."

The scene changed. A meadow, a French chateau behind it, a garden, a pasture, and a dark forest appeared.

"Lucien's lost estate," he thought aloud. Through his being there flowed the feeling that somehow the gold within the buccaneer's chest must be won.

Darkness deep and somber settled over all. Save for the occasional snap of a twig or a low murmur suggesting the existence of living beings in the jungle beyond the clearing, all was still.

A feeble yellow light illuminating the tent from within caused gigantic and preposterous shadows to leap about upon the canvas. Lucien and his father were working there. Having forgotten the events of a half hour before, they were mounting specimens.

Curlie sat without in the dark. Who can describe the sensations that sweep over a white boy alone in the heart of a tropical jungle at night? No darkness is so profound as the darkness of such a jungle. No

silence is so complete. From nowhere else in the world can such weird sounds come floating in on a gentle breeze.

The boy felt it and shuddered. "It's as if all the primitive people who built stone castles in this jungle, and all the Spanish settlers who hoped to find a home here and found only a grave, were here still; ghostly, haunting spectres of the past," he told himself, then shuddered again.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TURTLE HUNTERS

That same day Jeanne and the native girl, Camene, entered upon their one great sea adventure. It began in a very simple way. Petillo, the poor native fisherman with a large family, was still so weak from the ravages of fever that he was unable to tend his turtle nets. Having gone to visit them for him, to their great consternation the girls had found the principal net gone.

Jeanne's heart sank. "Looks as if the net was gone," she said to Camene as, with a skillful maneuver she brought their thirty foot sailboat into the wind.

The loss of a net by those who fish off the coast of Central America is no unusual thing. But the loss of a hundred yard turtle net in the midst of the turtle hunting season was nothing short of catastrophe.

"It's ruin for Petillo," Camene said. "Absolute ruin!"

Jeanne strained her eyes for some sign of a float or a decoy turtle telling that the net was still there. "Gone!" she said with a sigh. "It's gone sure enough."

It certainly would be a great disappointment if the net were really gone for good. They had been visiting it every other day for two weeks, and it had been great fun, for they could never tell just what they would find there. Six days before they had found a young shark, quite vicious and quite useless, too. Getting him out of the net had been dangerous sport, for he had put up a royal battle. And then, only the last visit, they had landed a fifty pound green turtle.

"If only he'd been a hawk's bill!" Jeanne was thinking as she took another tack. "Shell worth nine dollars a pound!" The green turtle had brought five dollars in the fish market at Belize, and that meant much to the hungry family. "But now, that cannot hap-

pen again, for the net is gone!" Her face grew sober as she scanned the sea.

"It was here, all right, just about here, off Espanola Reef," she thought to herself aloud. The name always gave her a thrill, for the reef had been so called on account of a Spanish treasure ship. No one could say for sure that it was here that the wash of the coral sand had buried the ancient treasure ship and the gold she carried. The name of the reef at least was intriguing.

Camene was tugging at her arm. "What's that over to the left?"

"It—why, it's a net float, one of ours!" Jeanne gave the tiller a sudden turn which came near sending them into the blue tropical sea. "Our float. The net's not lost; but how did it ever get out there?"

This question was quickly driven out of her mind by a much more important problem. The float was bobbing violently up and down, now on the surface, and now below, showing that there was something in the net. But what

was it? Could it be a jewfish big enough to swamp a dory, a shark, an alligator, or a turtle? If it were a turtle, what kind? A clumsy old loggerhead, green turtle, or a hawk's bill? "Hawk's bill! Here's hoping!" breathed the girl.

They were sailing before the wind, making all speed toward the float, which continued to bob up and down. As they came nearer Jeanne swung the boat about, then suddenly dropped sail. At once they were adrift. Standing up, she seized a paddle and, with skillful strokes, brought their craft alongside the float. "Take hold, and hang on," she said to Camene, nodding toward the float.

Grasping the top line of the net, though nearly dragged from the boat, Camene held on. Jeanne came to her assistance. The next moment they found themselves leaning over the gunwale, peering with anxious eyes into the deep. What was in their net? Would there be a fight? Would the treasure

taken be worth the struggle it cost? They were to know soon enough. Camene had not been staring into those blue waters ten seconds when she exclaimed: "Hawk's bill! A whopper!"

"Two!" excitedly whispered Jeanne. "And oh, such big ones!"

It was quite true, for hopelessly tangled in the net were two huge hawk's bill turtles. Camene said she thought the shell of each must weigh eight or ten pounds. "Oh joy!" exclaimed Jeanne. "Nine dollars a pound! How Petillo's eyes will shine! How his children will show their white teeth!"

Then her face sobered. She remembered that the turtles were in the net, not in the boat. There would be a battle royal. Had they been green turtles or loggerheads, it might have been different, but a hawk's bill is the hardest fighter of all the turtle family. Yes, there would be a struggle worthy of the name.

"We've got to get them up and land them,

one at a time," Camene said. "Have to cut them out of the net, but that won't matter, for it can be mended. Catch hold over here. No, let's get down the anchor." This accomplished, she directed, "Heave away!"

They did heave away. As Jeanne called, "Now, and now, and now!" they threw their combined weight against the net. Strand by strand it rose, and the smaller of the turtles with it. As he came closer they could see his head on his long neck swinging this way and that. It was a terrifying sight to the white girl.

"What — what if he bites!" exclaimed Jeanne.

"You mustn't let him do that!" warned Camene.

Under the native girl's urge, she did her utmost to help drag the turtle into the boat. Panting, perspiring, red in the face and weak in the knees, she battled on for twenty minutes, only in the end to lose her grip and allow the turtle to slowly sink to the bottom.

"Can't—can't do it," she panted. "Have to drag them over to the reef and—and pin them down in the net." As she looked away at Espanola Reef, an involuntary shudder shook her. It was always so when she thought of that reef. The Spanish treasure ship, so many had told her, had sunk there, and all her men had been lost. By chance her eyes wandered to the sky, which was partly covered by a suspicious haze. "We'll have to hurry. It may storm," she said to Camene. "Give me a hand with the anchor."

They found it a task to lift the heavy weight at either end of the long net, cut the lines and drop the weights into the boat. But this was nothing compared to the heart breaking toil of dragging the two great turtles over the rough bottom of the sea by rowing the boat with the long sweeping oars. A whole hour passed before they found themselves in the comparatively shallow water that lay before that mystery haunted Espanola Reef. All this time the

mist that hung over the horizon had been deepening.

"If it's a storm, it's a big one," Jeanne told herself with wrinkled brow, "and it's coming a long way." But she did not worry much about this, for in a half hour at the most they would have the turtles drawn up on the pink sand of the coral reef and safely tied in the nets. They would stake them down, then hoist sail and start for St. Christopher's Cay. As she bent her aching back to the oars she wished they were there at this very moment. Had she known how much time would elapse before they would reach that charming spot, her wish would have been far stronger.

In the meantime there was a duty to perform; a magnificent prize to be won that would secure necessities for a sick fisherman and his family for many days to come.

"Heave ho!" she shouted as gayly as she could. "Heave ho! We'll soon be there!"

As they heaved away at the oars, a strange

sound struck their ears. It was a wild, rushing roar, like that made by heavy breakers; yet as they looked back at the mysterious Espanola Reef, they saw only little wavelets playing there.

"Only look!" whispered Camene, gripping Jeanne's arm. In an instant their eyes were glued upon an awful sight that drove everything from their minds. Just before them, moving with the speed of the wind, was a gigantic wave. It was like a moving mountain in the midst of the sea. With a little prayer that they might be preserved, Jeanne dropped limply in the bottom of the boat. The native girl followed her example. They were not a moment too soon, for the next instant they felt their boat rearing skyward, to at last come crashing down upon a mass of boiling sea. It was all over in a moment's time.

Scarcely able to believe their senses, the girls rose, to stare about them. Imagine their surprise when they found that instead of be-

ing on the sea their boat rested high and dry on Espanola Reef.

"Gone!" lamented Camene as she examined the torn bits of net that still clung to the stern. "Our turtles are gone, and we're here to stay, who knows how long?" Her gaze swept the sea, but there was not a sail in sight. No help was near, their sail and oars were gone. They could not stir the heavy boat. What was to be done?

Jeanne stared at the clouds, knowing full well that they were facing one of those terrible storms that sweep across the Caribbean Sea. Suddenly a strange thing happened. The clouds seemed to take on the forms of ships, the last Spanish ships that ever came to attack the settlers on the shores of Honduras. In her heightened imagination she saw in their midst, sailing more proudly than them all, the treasure ship, *Espanola.* Yet, even as she stared, the ship appeared to forge ahead, and, rising high as if riding on the very wave that stranded them, plunged

straight on toward the fatal reef. With a cry she covered her eyes with her hands. But when she lowered them again the vision had faded.

"Got to get off the reef," she said suddenly. "Got to get off somehow. A storm is coming, and it's going to be a bad one. May sweep the whole reef bare." She shuddered at the thought.

"Look!" Camene pointed away to their left where a row of net floats were frantically bobbing in the shallow water.

"Turtles!" she exclaimed. "Our hawk's bill turtles! Could save them yet. If—" Again she looked away at the fast darkening sky.

CHAPTER XX

THE TREASURE SHIP, ESPANOLA

Matters were not going so well with the two girls.

The moment the turtles, still tangled in the net, were discovered they were forgotten. The storm was almost upon them and the heavy sailing boat was stranded high and dry. Jeanne looked about her and saw that while the greater part of the reef was already awash with the low rolling seas, the spot on which they stood rose some five feet about the level of the sea.

"The water will come up here, too," she said as she looked again at the rolling storm clouds. "It may even carry away the boat. We shall have to bury the anchor."

At once the two of them were at the task. First they lifted the heavy anchor out of the

boat and dragged it to the highest spot on the reef, then with the aid of a long fish knife they dug a hole for it. "Won't hold very long," Camene said, when at last the anchor had been lowered into place and the sand tramped down upon it. "May help a little, though."

As they could think of nothing more to do, they sat down upon the sand, expecting every moment to feel the wild beat of the storm breaking upon them. Five minutes they sat there in silence; ten minutes; fifteen. Still the storm did not come. To wait in silence; to feel that some power, great, terrible, destroying, is marching upon you, a power so still that you hear no sound, so quiet you feel not the faintest breath upon your cheek, is terrifying indeed.

Suddenly Jeanne, who had closed her eyes to shut it all out, opened them again to say quite calmly, "I'm hungry."

At this odd breaking of the spell, they both laughed, and at once felt better.

"No reason why we shouldn't eat," replied Camene. "We have half a dozen bananas, a cold lobster, and some other food in the basket up there in the prow."

As soon as the castaways had eaten their strange meal, Jeanne said, "Camene, you know the story of the Battle of St. George's Cay?"

"Yes."

"Tell it to me now," said the white girl, eager for some diversion that would take her mind from the terror of the approaching storm.

"Now?" said Camene, looking with a shudder at the ever thickening storm clouds.

"Now?"

"Yes."

"This story of the battle of St. George's Cay," Camene began, "is more than a century old; yet it is one of those stories that are ever new, that stir the imagination and lead men on in vain search for treasure. Although many a man has spent his all, and

grown gray in poverty while searching for the famous ship, not a broken mast nor spar of that vanished craft, the treasure galleon of the Spanish fleet, has ever been found.

"It was the last battle between the Spaniards and the English logwood cutters," went on Camene, seating herself on the dry sand which soon would be awash with waves of a raging sea. "The English logwood cutters, who were more like pirates than loggers, had fortified themselves on St. George's Cay. They had, to assist them, only one sloop of war. As the Spaniards came on to attack them, they counted twelve white sails gleaming in the sun. Things looked bad for the English, but a strange sight heartened them. A thirteenth ship appeared on the horizon. These buccaneers were superstitious and a thirteenth ship belonging to the enemy, according to their belief, meant bad luck and probably defeat.

"The thirteenth ship was the *Espanola*, the treasure ship of the fleet, and she never en-

tered the conflict. She had failed to meet the fleet at the port, and had followed in their wake. So, while the battle waged, the *Espanola* stood away over there on the horizon."

As the brown arm of the native girl swept in a circle that took in the dark stretch of storm clouds that hid the horizon, she appeared to be seeing the treasure ship lying low on that horizon, seemed to be hearing too the rattle of muskets and the wild cry of battle from St. George's Cay.

"The battle," she continued, "was won by the British logwood cutters, and the twelve Spanish ships, or what remained of them, sailed away. For the moment, in the crush of defeat, the Spaniards forgot their treasure ship which lay off there on the horizon, motionless and silent."

Again her arm swept the horizon, and from off the sea came a faint all but inaudible whisper, a breath of air that seemed to say, "It is so; it is so."

"That night," said Camene, half rising to face the rolling clouds, "there was a storm, such a one as is seldom known, even on these dangerous shores. The treasure ship stood away there when it broke. The logwood cutters, watching from St. George's Cay, saw her light tossed about in the storm. Like a moth hovering near a flame, it came closer and closer to the dangerous reefs."

The native girl paused as a sudden rush of wind was upon them. A long white sweep of water rolling from east to west, came racing along the reef, only to leave it darker, gloomier, more silent than before.

"The treasure ship's light," she continued, "wavered for hours. Then suddenly it ceased to move. The ship had struck the reef.

"'Ah ha!' shouted those logwood cutters, 'she is wrecked upon the reef. Tomorrow we shall overhaul her, and take her gold.'

"They never did. The storm lasted three days, and the whole shape of the coral reef was changed by the raging waves. The

Espanola was gone; the coral sands had swallowed her up. Not one piece has been found from that day until this. Unless," she hesitated, " unless the figurehead we found came from that wreck.

" And that," she said, turning to the white girl, " is the story of the Spanish treasure ship. What do you think of it? "

Jeanne did not reply at once. Instead she stared into the storm clouds. She saw Weisa Petillo who lived among the half-caste children of St. George's Cay. She was a little dark-eyed five-year-old girl who had won the older girl's love by the smile always to be found on her lips. As Jeanne closed her eyes she could see this brown girl as she had seen her last, standing on the beach, chewing a tough stalk of sugar cane, which was probably her only breakfast and dinner, and smiling. She had so hoped she and the others might help the little brown girl. The turtles they had caught might have supplied her with nourishing food and clothes to match that

smile. "And now they're gone," she said aloud.

"What's gone?" asked her companion.

"The turtles."

"Yes," agreed the other sadly, "the turtles are gone. The storm will wash them about and the sharp edges of their shells probably will cut the net, setting them free. The net will be lost too, I'm afraid."

"Camene!" cried Jeanne, her face suddenly aglow. "Wouldn't it be wonderful!"

"What?" asked Camene.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we should discover the treasure? Think of all that might be done with it, but then," she sighed, "we haven't a chance now."

"He said it would be a race, a race for treasure," she thought after a time. "Lucien said that. Looks as if this might be the end of the race. I wonder where he—where they are, all of them, Lucien, father and Curlie. They can't be back. If they were, they'd come for us in spite of the storm."

She had just concluded these gloomy meditations when with a suddeness that was startling the storm broke.

Wind tore at their garments, threatening to carry them away into the sea, while rain came beating down upon them. Waves mountain high swept across the reef until rain and waves, sea and sky seemed all one.

"This—this way!" Camene gripped the boat's mooring rope with one hand and clung with the other to her companion. "This way. Have to get to the boat. Can—can't stay here. Wa—ash us away. Here!" she shouted, gaining control of herself. "Get hold of this rope and hang tight. It's fastened to the anchor."

Hardly had the two girls gripped the rope when, with a sudden lift that took them off their feet, it rose and went swinging away from the reef. "It's the boat, the boat!" panted Camene. "The waves have lifted it off the reef."

It was true. As a flash of lightning came,

Jeanne caught sight of their boat twenty feet away, tossing on the crest of the waves. "Have to get there some way," she shrieked. "Got to make it. Cling tight to the rope and work your way out."

With prayer for strength, she gripped the rope hard, then glanced back at her companion. The native girl was just behind her, battling bravely. "We'll make it," she shouted through the storm.

A battle royal followed. Seized by a gigantic wave, the boat, bobbing upward and straight away, lifted them clear of the water and then, with a suddeness that was startling, the slacking rope plunged them far beneath a high crested wave. The boat loomed above them, and then sprang away; but all the time the anchor, buried deep in the coral sand, held. It seemed that their aching muscles could stand the strain no longer, that they must lose their hold and perish miserably. At this moment, as if some all seeing eye were watching over them, there came a lull in the

storm. Taking advantage of this, Jeanne doubled her efforts to reach the boat. She succeeded, and having tumbled in, she quickly dragged it back to her companion. They were no sooner huddled together in the swishing brine at the bottom of the boat than the storm broke with redoubled fury.

Too tired to move a muscle, Jeanne could do nothing but roll about in the bottom of the boat. All this time, however, her mind was active, for she was thinking, wondering, dreaming. "This storm," she asked herself, "will it last three days? The coral reef? Will it be changed? The wreck of the *Espanola*, the treasure ship, will it—" She dared not so much as whisper to herself the dream she hoped would come true.

* * *

The little jungle party, Curlie, Lucien and Pier Ducas, were safe enough and were experiencing great good fortune.

The storm, which was largely an affair of the sea, had not reached their inland camp,

so, after Lucien and his father had retired for the night, Curlie sat long in the darkness, thinking, wondering, dreaming.

He had been on other trips with Lucien. Never before had he brought along his black box. Somehow, he always felt lucky when the trick box was along. This was a portable radio. He had thought only to amuse the natives with this. Now that they had virtually made him prisoner, he had hoped to play upon their superstitious natures and frighten them.

Having put a loud speaker inside the snake head drum, he had tuned in on Havana, Cuba, and had made the drum talk. The Indians had chanted a charm song to drive away the spirits. That had been proof enough that they were frightened.

"And what's next?" he asked himself. "I have no other tricks in my box."

He needed no other tricks. To his surprise, as he went down to the river early next morning, he found his boat drawn high on the

beach. To his immensely greater surprise and joy he found it loaded with all manner of tropical foods. Great heaps of cocoanuts, yams, pineapples and strange tropical fruits were topped by two finely dressed turkeys and a young porker. Forward was such a heap of dried corn cakes as would have supplied a small army with three days' rations.

"Yahoo!" he shouted back to the others. "Strike the tent. We're on our way!"

"And now," he murmured, to himself, "now for the buccaneers' gold!"

CHAPTER XXI

UNCOVERED BY THE STORM

Night came down upon the sea. Still the storm roared on. The boat, dancing now like a cork, and now leaping like a flying fish, rode the waves, but the two girls were so tossed about that they found no opportunity for rest and little enough for thought. The few thoughts that crossed Jeanne's mind were, like the sea, dark and troubled.

Somehow the night passed. With the nearing of dawn the storm fell. But still the waves ran high.

The first faint touch of dawn found Jeanne straining her eyes for some sight of land.

"Only a square yard of sand," she said to Camene who had kept close to her all through the long night. "Just to know that there is still some dry land upon the earth, that the great flood has not come again!"

"What is that?" Camene spoke in an awed whisper. "See, over there."

Jeanne strained her eyes, but made out nothing. Two minutes passed before she saw a black bulk looming above the surface of the sea.

"Can it be that some ship has been wrecked so near to us?" she asked. "Have we heard nothing of it?"

"It is possible." The native girl's lips scarcely moved. She had seen wrecks upon the sea. She knew all too well the terror of it all.

For a time with strained eyes they strove for a clear view. Then of a sudden the native girl began to laugh.

"Why!" Jeanne exclaimed. "How can you laugh at a tragedy!"

"The tragedy," said Camene, "is very old. See how black and encrusted it all is. See the ancient timbers. And see! See, Jeanne! The shipshead is gone. It is your treasure ship! It is the *Espanola!*"

"It—it can't be!" Jeanne was fairly overcome by a desire first to laugh, then to cry.

"But it is! It can be no other. Come!" said Camene, dragging her from the boat and striking boldly for the reef. "We must get a line upon her before some one comes sailing in. If we have a line on her, she is ours."

* * *

The morning sun found Curlie and his companions pushing their dugout upstream. Their minds were filled with strange questions. Why had the Mayas loaded their boat with food, then returned it? Not one of the three could tell. How had the talking drum affected the Indians?

"They are very superstitious," Pier Ducas said. "It is more than probable that they credit our friend Monsieur Curlie Carson with supernatural power. It may be too that they suspect him of being in league with the devil. If that is so, they think of him as a god, or at least as a great priest, and the food they brought is an offering."

Their experience with the Mayas could not turn them back. Nothing could. They had set their faces toward the heart of the jungle, and would not pause until they caught the red gleam of the treasure chest.

So the boat moved upstream. Sitting forward, ever studying the bank, watching for the narrow clearing, Curlie paddled as if his life depended upon it.

Lucien, in the center, worked methodically, and dreamed the while of chateaux, green meadows, and dark forests of France.

The mind of Pier Ducas was, as ever, upon the life of the jungle. He put little faith in the treasure chest. He had come on the journey because he was ever ready to please his son, and because he feared the youth might need the council of an older head before the business was done with.

Curlie had only a shady notion of the distance they must travel. He had gone up the river once, in the dark. He had come down in a hurry on the crest of a flood. Little

wonder that few familiar objects met his gaze.

It was as they rounded a curve that an exclamation escaped his lips.

"There! There's the windrow of fallen trees. There's where the cyclone struck. Straight ahead. The chest must be in the midst of it."

"We may not be able to pass," said Pier Ducas. "The river seems blocked with trees."

"We'll find a way through," said Curlie. There was a joyous note in his voice. They were nearing the end.

They did find a way through. Wriggling, twisting, beating back this way, then that, they came at last to the silent clearing where once a cabin had stood.

The great heap of broken and twisted trees lay just as they had fallen. Curlie had resolved not to think of that which lay beneath that heap. He succeeded fairly well, for once their eyes fell upon the copper treasure chest, excitement ran high.

"It's standing on end. It's open!" exclaimed Curlie, as, leaping from the boat, he swarmed up the bank.

"Been rifled?" panted Lucien.

"Can't tell. Look at the mud that's oozed out of it and dried."

"It would seem," said Pier Ducas, more observant, less excited than his youthful companions, "that nature has opened your box for you. See. There is a dent on this side. The lock has been sprung."

"By what?" asked Curlie.

"By that huge limb of a mahogany tree," said Pier Ducas, pointing to a branch not six feet away.

"Well," Curlie's face became suddenly sober as he bent down to look within, "it seems that mud is the prize we've come near losing our lives to win. Just look!" He held up a handful of dry river ooze.

"Let's dig it out. Push it over. Lend a hand," said Lucien, trembling with excitement.

Having dragged the lid back, they pushed the chest face down upon the ground. It fell with a dull thud.

"Now back again," said Curlie.

"Did you ever see such a heavy chest?" said Lucien when, after lifting with all their combined strength, they succeeded in righting it.

Curlie did not answer. He was on his hands and knees pawing about in the dry mud that had fallen from the chest.

"Not a guinea, not a piece of eight, not a plugged farthing," he muttered. "Say! There wasn't any gold in that chest, not a sou!"

In consternation, the boys sat on the ground to stare at the chest.

Not a word was said, not a move for fully three minutes.

"Well," drawled Curlie. Rising stiffly, he swung a foot at the chest.

"Huh!" he grunted, n u r s i n g his toe. "Don't sound exactly hollow."

The discovery he made at that moment was the most exciting of the whole trip. The chest was not empty. It was only half empty. The lower half was filled with a substance solid as a brick.

"That's strange," said Pier Ducas, examining it with the eye of a trained scientist. "Some silt from the river water has formed into a solid mass. Over with it! Get the ax, Lucien. We'll crack it loose. Then we shall see."

Two lusty pairs of arms spelled each other in beating the bottom of that buccaneer's chest.

"That will do," said Pier Ducas at last. "It has all cracked off and fallen in. Up with her once more!"

This time Curlie could have tumbled the chest over alone.

Such a sight as met their gaze as the chest rolled away! The ground where the chest had lain was strewn with broken fragments of a gray mineral substance. Embedded in

these gray fragments were many small disks.

"Ducats, doubloons, cross money, pieces of eight, louis d'or," said Lucien, as if talking in a dream.

The more practical Curlie, seizing an ax, began the business of freeing these golden and silver messengers of hope from the crust that had imprisoned them for so many decades.

It was not a bulky treasure that they carried aboard that afternoon. Some six or seven hundred coins beside the chest, which as an antique was of value—that was all. But, considering the fact that each coin, because of its great age, was worth many times its original value, it was a most valuable find.

"The treasure hunt is over," said Curlie.

"It was a race between sea and land, between the girls and the boys of this party, for treasure, and we have won."

"Not so much as we hoped," said Curlie. "There's not a ransom for a lost estate in this old chest."

"You are right, friend Monsieur Curlie Carson. There is not," said Lucien sadly.

But after all, had they won? They were to see.

* * *

It is one thing to discover a black hulk that has been uncovered of its century old sands by the violence of the storm, quite another to prove that she is the long lost treasure ship that once sailed the Spanish Main so boldly and so well. It was true that she had lost her figurehead, but so too has many another brave ship.

When the two girls reached the vessel's side, they found that, while her time-blackened prow stood well up from the reef, her hulk was still choked with sand. To shovel away this sand in the exciting search for treasure was not a task which two girls could complete in an hour. It would require many hands for hours on end. Welcome indeed were the kind fisher folk who came to search for the missing girls only to remain and dig.

Hours had passed, grimmy, perspiring hours beneath a blistering tropical sun when of a sudden from deep down in the heart of the wreck there came a shout:

"The chest! The chest!"

Another hour of digging and tugging, then the great copper bound oaken chest rolled out upon the pink coral sands. It was heavy. It was full. The French girl's eyes bulged with excitement and wild speculation as they rested upon it.

"But after all, one should not hope too much," she said to her companion thoughtfully.

"But look!" exclaimed the native girl. "A sail!"

"It is the treasure hunters returning," said Jeanne, making the sand fly in her excited leaping up and down. "It is father and brother and Monsieur Curlie Carson. Now we shall know who has the greater treasure."

When the two boys and the sedate naturalist came sailing in they found the vivacious

French girl with arms folded sitting astride her mysterious chest. With a red sash about her waist and a knife between her teeth she looked the veritable buccaneer she mimmicked.

"Heave ho!" she shouted as she sprang from her perch. "Buckets of blood! Buckets of blood! Heave ho! my hearties. Let go the machettes!"

With this invitation a big black Carib struck the ancient lock of the chest such a blow with his long bladed knife as sent the lid leaping upward. In another moment the pink sand of the coral reef ran yellow with old gold; for this indeed was the wreck of the *Espanola* and the chest none other than that long famed treasure chest of the ancient Spanish fleet.

"Now you may redeem your rightful inheritance," exclaimed Curlie as he rose from the task of examining the treasure.

"And you your schooner," replied the generous Jeanne.

In the end they bought the schooner to-

gether and sailed away to Lucien's most beloved France, where, by an ancient chateau, where scraggly pear trees spread their arms like robbers in stocks against the walls and where at night wild deer come down from the edge of the forest to blink at the light, they spent many happy and peaceful hours.

But, in the end, the spirit of adventure called. Curlie returned to America. There he came upon old friends and with them launched upon fresh undertakings in lands more strange than any that had gone before. You will find the events of this curious and perilous journey set down in our next book, to be entitled, "The Invisible Wall."

Reilly
&
Lee